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Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

7673rd meeting
Monday, 18 April 2016, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Liu Jieyi	(China)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Lucas
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Japan	Mr. Yoshikawa
	Malaysia	Mr. Ibrahim
	New Zealand	Mr. McCully
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Senegal	Mr. Ciss
	Spain	Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Mr. Pressman
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Ramírez Carreño

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Bahrain, Bangladesh, Brazil, Cuba, Iceland, India, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Maldives, Morocco, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Qatar, the Republic of Korea, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Sweden, the Syrian Arab Republic, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey and Viet Nam to participate in this meeting.

I propose that the Council invite the observer of the Observer State of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in the meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

It is so decided.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. João Pedro Vale de Almeida, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, and His Excellency Mr. Wilfried I. Emvula, Vice-Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to participate in this meeting.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of the Holy See to the United Nations to participate in this meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to warmly welcome the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, to whom I now give the floor.

The Secretary-General: I thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity to brief the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East.

In just a few days, the Jewish people will celebrate one of Judaism's most important holidays, Passover. I extend my best wishes to my Jewish friends and colleagues for a happy and peaceful holiday.

Allow me to begin with my visit to Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan and Tunisia three weeks ago with the President of the World Bank, Mr. Jim Yong Kim. Our trip sought to highlight the need to increase development assistance through innovative financing mechanisms for countries, like Lebanon and Jordan, that are disproportionately impacted by the conflict in Syria. Last Friday, together with the Presidents of the World Bank and the Islamic Development Bank, I co-chaired a ministerial-level conference to garner the financial support for that initiative. I am pleased to inform members that we had an encouraging response. Eight countries and the European Union generously pledged $1 billion for a concessional loan facility, $141 million in grants and $500 million for a guarantee facility. In addition, many other countries expressed support for this innovative initiative and their intention to provide financial support. I hope that donors will continue to respond to this effort to invest in peace and stability in the region.

For over six months, Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory have been gripped by a surge in violence, triggered by individual terrorist attacks by Palestinians. Approximately 30 Israelis and 200 Palestinians have been killed, with most of the Palestinians killed while reportedly carrying out knife, gun or car-ramming attacks. I condemn all such attacks unreservedly. There can never be any justification for stabbings, vehicle attacks, shootings, incitement to violence or the glorification of killers.

I welcome the joint Palestinian-Israeli efforts that have contributed to a reduction of tensions in recent weeks. However, these latest killings have only deepened the divisiveness, hatred and grief. I also welcome the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian security discussions on Area A. I urge all sides to recognize the risks of failing to reach a lasting understanding on this pressing matter. I acknowledge the recent public statements by President Abbas rejecting violence and terror and firmly supporting continued security coordination with Israel. President Abbas and I discussed the importance of those and other issues in Amman on 27 March. I encourage more such statements, backed by concrete actions. Israelis and Palestinians need their leaders to elevate public discourse above mutual accusations and

to engage in a constructive dialogue that can rebuild the trust that has all but evaporated.

The Middle East Quartet is moving forward on a report that will review the situation on the ground and the threats to a two-State solution and provide recommendations on how to advance peace. The report is intended to help inform international discussions to advance the two-State solution: a sovereign and independent State of Palestine living side by side in peace and security with the State of Israel. Tragically, that solution seems more distant than it has for many decades. A 20-year-old Palestinian living under occupation has seen no political progress at all during his or her lifetime. Impatience and despair at that fact is one of the root causes of the violence that blights Israeli and Palestinian communities, prevents economic development and growth and denies the human potential of millions of people. It is incumbent upon all of us to do everything in our power to secure lasting peace.

Our collective efforts face dynamics in Israel and Palestine that call into question the willingness of the parties to overcome the hurdles to peace. Israel continues to demolish Palestinian structures in the occupied West Bank at an alarming rate. The total number of demolitions in 2015 was exceeded in early April of this year. More than 840 people have been displaced. Most of the structures concerned are deemed illegal by Israel because they were built without permits; yet Israel makes it almost impossible for Palestinians to acquire permits. These acts raise concerns that Israel intends to implement over 11,000 outstanding demolition orders in Area C of the West Bank.

I am also concerned by the continued punitive demolitions of homes belonging to families of alleged Palestinian perpetrators of attacks against Israelis. Punitive demolitions are a form of collective punishment, which is prohibited under international law. They are unproven as a deterrent and they fuel tensions by exacerbating feelings of injustice and hatred.

Meanwhile, settlement plans and retroactive legalizations continue to advance in almost untraceable steps through the complicated planning process. Those steps, together with last month's declaration of "State land" — the first in over 18 months — signal that Israel's strategic settlement enterprise continues to expand on land intended for a future Palestinian State. I once again reiterate that settlements are illegal under international law and undermine the two-State solution.

The creation of new facts on the ground through demolitions and settlement-building raises questions about whether Israel's ultimate goal is in fact to drive Palestinians out of certain parts of the West Bank, thereby undermining any prospect for a transition to a viable Palestinian State.

On the Palestinian political front, I regret the continued failure of intra-Palestinian discussions to achieve genuine unity on the basis of non-violence, democracy and the Palestine Liberation Organization principles. I reiterate my call on Palestinian factions to demonstrate their commitment to reconciliation, which is integral to reaching the goal of Palestinian statehood and to securing a just and lasting resolution to the conflict. It is imperative for all factions to ensure that both Gaza and the West Bank are returned to the control of a single, democratic and legitimate Palestinian Authority.

I am extremely concerned by today's announcement on the uncovering of a tunnel crossing from Gaza into Israel — the first such discovery since the 2014 Gaza conflict. I strongly condemn the construction of attack tunnels as dangerous and provocative moves that not only threaten the lives of Israelis and Palestinians, but also undermine efforts to rebuild Gaza. Furthermore, three rockets were fired from Gaza towards Israel on 14 April, all of which landed short of Israel. No injuries were reported. I call upon all parties to refrain from any actions that could lead to renewed conflict in Gaza.

The Palestinian Government has laid out an ambitious $3.8 billion agenda for stabilizing Gaza, repairing damage from the 2014 conflict and getting a recovery under way. Economic development and rebuilding critical electricity and water infrastructure are essential. On 8 April, the Gaza power plant shut down, meaning that residents of Gaza are now supplied with electricity for just four to six hours per day. More than a year and a half after the conflict in Gaza, those conditions are intolerable. I strongly encourage all Member States to fulfil their commitments to support the reconstruction and development of Gaza.

More positively, on 3 April, Israel expanded the Gaza fishing zone from six to nine nautical miles. I welcome that development and encourage Israel to expedite further easing measures to support the long-suffering people of Gaza.

Turning briefly to Lebanon, I had an opportunity to address political and security issues with Lebanese

leaders in Beirut on 24 and 25 March, consistent with the concerns of the Council. These include the importance of preserving Lebanon's model of pluralism and coexistence from regional tensions; the urgency of electing a president without further delay; the need for all parties to work with Prime Minister Tammam Salam to enable the Government to function effectively and to continue to engage in political dialogue; the importance of sustained international support for the Lebanese Armed Forces; and the expectation that both Lebanon and Israel will work to consolidate stability along the Blue Line and advance the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006).

I also discussed the importance of actively supporting the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, particularly in the light of the recent buildup of tensions in Palestinian camps, including a car bomb on 12 April that killed a camp official near Ein el Hilweh.

Turning to the Golan, I note the statements made yesterday by Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel. This is a long-standing issue that all parties have a responsibility to help resolve. I remind Israel of its obligation to implement Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 497 (1981) in all of their parts.

The path out of the current political deadlock requires commitment, compromise, mutual respect and leadership on both sides. It also requires the acceptance — demonstrated by deeds as well as words — that the two-State solution is the only road to peace that meets the national aspirations of both peoples: Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace, security and mutual recognition.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): At the outset, I wish to express the State of Palestine's congratulations to China on its skilled leadership in the presidency of the Security Council this month and also express appreciation for the convening of today's important open debate. I also thank the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, for his briefing on the current situation and for his continuous efforts to address this long-standing issue on the United Nations agenda in the interest of peace and justice.

Since our last debate in January, we have addressed the Security Council on a near-weekly basis regarding the critical situation in occupied Palestine, including East Jerusalem, as a result of Israel's illegal and destructive policies and measures. In each communication to the Council, we have tried to draw urgent attention to the grave breaches of international humanitarian law and human rights violations being systematically committed by the occupying Power, including its occupying forces and terrorist settlers. We have equally appealed for urgent action, in line with international law, to compel Israel to halt its crimes and violations, which are inflicting widespread suffering on the Palestinian civilian population, further inflaming tensions and destabilizing the situation, destroying the two-State solution and sabotaging the chances for a peaceful solution.

Regrettably, this has all been to no avail. The Security Council remains paralysed, failing to uphold its obligations in accordance with its Charter duties, international law and its own resolutions. It continues — debate after debate, consultation after consultation and letter after letter — to disregard the global calls to act seriously to stanch this open, bleeding wound in the international body by upholding international law and fulfilling its duty to advance a solution to the conflict that would assist the Palestinian people to finally realize the freedom, rights and justice they have been unjustly denied and to achieve Palestinian-Israeli peace, security and coexistence.

Indeed, those are the principal objectives at the core of every appeal we have made to the Council, week after week, month after month, year after year, decade after decade. Our appeals have all been made in full accordance with international law, not founded on some baseless claim or desire. Nothing that we come to this Chamber to ask for is beyond the realm of legality, beyond the parameters of justice or beyond the imperatives of peace.

And yet, every time we approach the Security Council, we are chided by a Council member and told that it is either not the right time or not the appropriate venue to address the matter, or, ironically, that the peace process will somehow be undermined by our seeking rights and peace, or that the doors of the Council are totally closed, period.

When will it ever be the right time to approach the Council? At what point of crisis will the Council be galvanized to finally act?

After years of restraint — years of a dramatic decline in the situation to dangerous levels; years of unquantifiable loss and suffering for the Palestinian people; years of destruction of the two-State solution and obstruction of the prospects for peace; and years of immense damage to the Security Council's credibility and the rule of international law — we can no longer wait and can no longer accept excuses and pretexts, domestic or otherwise, that permit violations of the law and of our people's rights by the occupying Power, with total impunity.

On the ground, the corrosive attrition of the two-State solution by Israel's illegal settlement activities has been unrelenting. The confiscation and de facto annexation of land, settlement construction, wall construction, the demolition of Palestinian homes and property, and the forced transfer of Palestinian civilians continue unabated, all with utter contempt for and in grave breach of international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention and the Security Council's resolutions, and in blatant mockery of the international community's demands for an end to all Israeli settlement activities.

During the 26 January open debate (see S/PV.7610), we heard loud and clear the reaffirmations of the illegality of Israel's settlement activities and the unanimous calls for a halt to all such policies and measures. What we have witnessed instead is the intensification of this illegal behaviour, further fragmenting the contiguity of our State's territory and gravely undermining the viability of the two-State solution on the pre-1967 borders.

Thousands more dunums of Palestinian land have been confiscated by Israel in the West Bank, with more than 2,300 dunums slated for expropriation south of Jericho and more than 1,200 dunums south of Nablus in the span of one week alone. Home demolitions by the occupying Power have also alarmingly spiked, as reported by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, with more than 586 homes or structures demolished and more than 700 Palestinians forcibly displaced and rendered homeless since the start of the year.

Bedouin Palestine refugees have been especially affected by the demolitions, and entire communities are threatened with forced transfer. Of course, the recent period has also witnessed the advancement of plans for the construction of hundreds of additional settlement units, including in the past week, when the occupying Power decided to proceed with the construction of at least 250 settlement units, which will end up housing thousands more Israeli settlers, adding to the over 650,000 settlers already illegally transferred to the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

The stark reality is that, as reported by the Israeli organization Peace Now, plans for the construction of Israeli settlements increased by 250 per cent in the first quarter of 2016, as compared to the same period last year. We are therefore compelled to ask the Council: does that not seriously call into question, once again, the credibility of Israel's professed commitment to the two-State solution, or of ever ending its occupation of our land? How can those facts in any way be reconciled with the Council's clear demands for an end to Israel's settlement activities and to all attempts to alter the demography, character and status of the Palestinian and other Arab territories occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem, according to its own resolutions? When will the Council hold Israel accountable for those violations and insist on compliance, the minimum, most essential requirement for upholding the law, overcoming that major obstacle to peace and preserving the possibility of the two-State solution?

In tandem with Israel's colonization of our land, it continues its aggression against our people, with Palestinian casualties mounting as a result of daily military raids by Israeli occupying forces and violence and terror attacks by extremist Israeli settlers, in no small part fuelled by the incitement and inflammatory rhetoric of Israeli Government officials, including by the Israeli Prime Minister and members of his Cabinet, and by extremist religious figures.

Since the current unrest began, in October 2015, more than 200 Palestinian men, women and children have been killed, with the bodies of many of those killed withheld by the occupying Power, even denying them dignity in death. As they did in the war on Gaza in 2014, the occupying forces have also continued to use excessive force, injuring more than 16,000 people, including thousands of children and women, in the past six months. That same period has also witnessed the detention of more than 4,000 Palestinians, adding to

the ranks of over 7,000 Palestinians, among them 450 children, now imprisoned or detained by Israel.

Our children and youth are being especially targeted and traumatized by this cruel occupation as Israeli occupying forces operate on a blatant shoot-to-kill policy, with children as young as 13 years of age shot and killed without consequences. The stories of Palestinian children and youth killed in broad daylight, including those extrajudicially murdered by the occupying forces, have become too numerous to recount. Nevertheless, in our weekly letters to the Council, we have tried to draw attention to those brutal murders and to share the names of the innocent human lives so violently taken and so tragically lost.

Faced with such relentless aggression by the occupation, Palestinian children, one generation after another, are being permanently scarred and the present and future fabric of our society is being destroyed. And yet the Security Council remains silent and the Palestinian people continue to be denied the protection they are in dire need of, and entitled to, in accordance with international humanitarian law. The reality is that a defenceless civilian population is being left to the merciless brutality of this military occupation, which has lasted almost half a century, an occupation whose forces are armed to the teeth with the most lethal and sophisticated military weaponry.

Our appeals for protection have been met with sympathy at best and indifference at worst. We have been repeatedly told to be reasonable about what the Council can or cannot do, in spite of the Council's own legislation, including resolutions 605 (1987) and 904 (1994), which clearly call the for protection of the Palestinian people, and in spite of the study of precedents shared by the Secretary-General with the Council in October 2015, which has not been the subject of one serious discussion. The failure to protect, as in all other cases in history, will only foster greater Israeli impunity and disregard for Palestinian life, endangering even more innocent civilians. The Security Council has not even held a discussion on the issue of protection. How shameful of an act is that on the shoulders of the members of the Security Council.

At a time when the situation is reaching boiling point, the passivity and silence of the Security Council is truly shocking. Stopping the deterioration of the situation and salvaging the prospects for peace require responsible action without delay. While we have heard repeatedly how unsustainable the status quo is, in fact there is no status quo and the situation, far from being static, is worsening every single day, inching towards an implosion.

The Council cannot stand idly by waiting for the next full-blown crisis. It is illogical and unacceptable to continue appeasing Israel's intransigence and arrogant, reckless flouting of the law. Israel must be held accountable for its crimes and violations of an entire people's rights, including to self-determination and freedom, once and for all. We have said it before in the Chamber and we must repeat it again: the crisis is existential and we can no longer wait.

We will therefore act responsibly to uphold our duties to the Palestinian people and will continue to do whatever we can in the international arena, foremost here at the United Nations and fully based on international law, using all diplomatic, political, legal and non-violent means, to redress the plight of our people, alleviate their suffering and advance the realization of their rights, justice and peace.

We have therefore begun our efforts and continue our appeals for the Council to act through the adoption of a clear and firm draft resolution to address the immediate issues before us, including, inter alia, the illegality of the Israeli settlement campaign and its destructive impact on the two-State solution; the increasing extremism and violence of Israeli settlers against Palestinian civilians and the need for their protection; and the urgency of international and regional efforts, particularly within the context of the Arab Peace Initiative, to create a credible political horizon and support the parties to de-escalate the volatile situation, rebuild trust and uphold their legal obligations and commitments towards resolving all final status issues and achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive peace.

Consultations are under way with Egypt, as the Arab representative in the Security Council, along with our other partners in the Arab Ministerial Committee, for a decision on when to formally proceed. We welcome the support of all concerned parties in regard to that effort and the calls for the Council to uphold its duties towards the question of Palestine before the situation further unravels, more innocent lives are lost and the two-State solution is relegated to the archives of history.

In that regard, we also commend the efforts being undertaken by the Quartet, as well as by the Government of France. We note that the French initiative in particular emphasizes the urgency of the matter — a matter that cannot be shelved or placed on a backburner until all other crises in the Middle East are resolved and one that, if left unattended, will only foster greater Israeli impunity and create a more fertile ground for radicalization on both sides — and also significantly emphasizes the need for a collective process, with the serious engagement and support of international and regional partners, including a role for the Security Council, to help the parties resolve all final status issues and finally bring an end to the occupation and the conflict as whole.

It is time to stop managing the conflict. This conflict is not intractable. Its solution has long been known and firmly rooted in United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative. The international community must move beyond slogans and professing its commitment to human rights, justice and the two-State solution in theory, and actually mobilize the political will to resolve the conflict. The alleviation of the humanitarian crisis in Palestine can never replace a just solution as the ultimate objective.

It is surreal to witness the collective hand-wringing of the international community at the deplorable humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, as if it were caused by an uncontrollable natural disaster rather than the man-made disaster that it really is, wantonly inflicted by the Israeli war machine and the illegal Israeli blockade — by air, land and sea — that has isolated, impoverished, traumatized and dehumanized the entire Palestinian civilian population of Gaza. Despite the deeply regrettable political divide in Palestine and the prolonged efforts to achieve reconciliation and unity as a matter of national urgency, the failure to bridge that divide cannot be used as an excuse to continue imprisoning 1.8 million people and forcing them to live in the ruins of war and in mass deprivation.

Faced with that reality, in addition to Israel's relentless onslaught against the Palestinian civilian population and colonization in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, how can it be expected that our people, especially our youth, maintain any belief in international law and the international community's promises to uphold it? How can they maintain any hope that this injustice will end? And, in the absence of hope and belief, how is it possible to stave off despair and push back against the tide of radicalism and extremism plaguing our world?

The time is long overdue for ending the suffering of the Palestinian people under this illegal foreign occupation and ensuring the realization of their inalienable human rights, including to self-determination and freedom in their independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and a just solution to the Palestine plight, the most protracted refugee crisis in the world. If reason, responsibility and legal obligations fail to move the Council, perhaps reflecting on the immense human suffering caused by this inhumane occupation might create compassion and invoke moral responsibility to act.

There are too many compelling human stories to tell, but I wish to conclude with one today. On a recent visit to the Aida refugee camp in the West Bank, an Australian Premier, Michael Baird, met with a group of young Palestinian children and asked one of the boys what he dreamed of becoming when he was older. The boy's response was,

> "It's hard to have dreams when you know they can't come true."

When children feel they cannot even dream, we must acknowledge the depths of despair and hopelessness and human devastation that this occupation and conflict have wrought. We must also acknowledge the depths of our failure. We can no longer ignore or postpone the urgency to act. Reviving their hope, rectifying this historic injustice, making peace a reality and saving the future generations of both Palestinian and Israeli children depend upon it.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Danon (Israel): Once again we have gathered to discuss the Middle East, Israel and the Palestinians. Time and time again we meet in this Chamber for this debate. We hear very long discussions about the nature of the conflict and new proposals to solve it. But the root of the conflict is not very hard to understand, and the solution is clear.

For 67 years, Israel has been pursuing peace. Despite decades of war and rejection, we never gave up on that goal. Israel finally achieved peace when two brave Arab leaders, President Sadat and King Hussein, chose to lay down their arms. They chose the path of cooperation and partnership over the misery of war and

conflict. That was the key to peace with Egypt in 1981. That was the key to peace with Jordan in 1994. And it is the key to peace with the Palestinians today.

The Palestinian people deserve peace. They deserve a brighter, better future. Therefore, let me be clear. On the day the Palestinian leadership rejects terror and violence, on the day they embrace coexistence and cooperation, that is the day there will be peace. But is that what the Palestinian leadership really wants? Do they really want peace? If those gathered here believe that to be true, then they will have to explain a few inconvenient facts.

Fact number one is that the Palestinian leadership refuses to condemn the murder of Israeli men, women and children. Let me ask everyone in the Chamber: do not Israeli lives matter?

Fact number two is that the Palestinian Authority glorifies terrorism and terrorists. They name squares after suicide bombers and hang posters of them on school walls. Tell me, when did terrorism become heroism?

Fact number three is that Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian Authority, refuses to even sit down with Prime Minister Netanyahu. How can we make peace if we cannot even talk? Just recently, the Palestinian Foreign Minister, Riyad Al-Maliki, said loudly and clearly,

> "We will never go back and sit again in a direct Israeli-Palestinian negotiation."

We understand that members of the Council may not have answers to those questions. What we do not understand is why we do not demand answers.

The State of Israel and the people of Israel do not have any more time to wait for answers. For decades we have been facing Palestinian terrorism. In just the last few months, Israelis have faced a wave of non-stop daily attacks by Palestinian terrorists: over 300 separate attacks in 176 days. That means two terror attacks per day, every day, for half a year. That is the reality. Thirty-four people have been killed, and hundreds have been injured. How has the Palestinian leadership responded? Have they stopped the daily calls for violence that are fuelling the bloodshed? Has there been a clear condemnation by the Palestinian leadership? The answer is no. Instead of condemning those attacks, they encourage them. They reward terrorists and their families with monthly salaries. The more horrific the attack, the more horrific the crime, the higher the payment. In Palestinian society, terrorists are treated like heroes.

This year, we all participated in the sixtieth session of the Commission on the Status of Women. On International Women's Day, official Palestinian Authority television called Dalal Mughrabi a role model for Palestinian women. For those who may not know or who may not remember, Dalal Mughrabi was a terrorist. In 1978, she hijacked an Israeli bus and murdered 38 innocent people, including 13 children. This is the woman the Palestinians have turned into a national symbol.

These are facts we never seem to hear in this Chamber. Instead, some are all too eager to offer justification for Palestinian terror and excuses for violence. Many find it convenient to ignore the basic truth: the endless incitement and the ongoing glorification of violence is directly responsible for the murder of innocent Israelis.

For many Palestinians, incitement is a daily reality. Children go to school and listen to tales of terrorists. Teenagers turn on the television and see a constant flow of images of hate and violence. Young adults go to mosques and hear sermons demonizing Israel and calling for its destruction, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

This reality has deadly consequences. On 17 January, a young Israeli mother was painting the door of her house when she was brutally attacked by a 16-year-old Palestinian terrorist. She was repeatedly stabbed at the entrance to her home. Knowing her children were inside, a few metres away, she heroically fought the terrorist. Even as she was bleeding to death, she stopped him from pulling the knife from her body. With her last ounce of strength, she made sure that the terrorist could not use the knife again to attack her six children.

That woman's name was Dafna Meir. Dafna was a hospital nurse from Otniel, a loving wife and a mother of six. At her funeral, Dafna's husband, Natan, said,

> "You left me six treasures, I will keep them safe for you. My Dafna is one in a million. My Dafna, thank you for every moment I had with you."

One of those treasures, Dafna's eldest daughter, Renana, said,

> "I didn't just lose a mother, but also my best friend. It's hard for me to think we will not laugh together or fight anymore, that you won't accompany me down the aisle and to the maternity ward."

Today, Natan and Renana are here with us in the Chamber, sitting behind me. They lost a wife and a mother. They paid the most painful price.

We have to ask ourselves why that happened. What drives a 16-year-old boy to stab another human being to death? The Palestinian teenager — he was arrested — gave us the answer in his confession. He said that what made him want to kill a Jew, any Jew, was a television show on Palestinian television. The Palestinian culture of hate and constant brainwashing is responsible for the loss of too many Israelis, and it is directly responsible for the murder of Dafna Meir.

It is time for real answers, it is time for the truth. Since no one else will ask the hard questions, I will. In the name of the people of Israel, in the name of the Israeli victims, and in the name of the family of Dafna Meir, let me ask the Palestinian observer here with us today. Mr. Mansour, will you condemn Palestinians who commit terror attacks against Israelis?

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): **[Inaudible]**

Mr. Danon (Israel): We are saying it all the time. You should say it in Arabic, not in English. You should teach it in your schools. You should stop the hatred. You should stop naming streets after terrorists. Look at the squares in Ramallah. Look at the streets in Jenin. You are naming streets after terrorists.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): [...] against incitement. Are you willing to come and attend these meetings in the presence of the Americans?

Mr. Danon (Israel): We condemn all terrorism — in Hebrew, in English, in Arabic.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): We condemn the killing of all innocent civilians, including Palestinian civilians. Do you do the same?

Mr. Danon (Israel): You are paying them. You are paying the families of terrorists.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): Do you do the same?

Mr. Danon (Israel): You are glorifying terrorism. Shame on you for doing that.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): We do not. We do not.

Mr. Danon (Israel): Shame on you for glorifying terrorism.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): Shame on you for killing thousands of Palestinian children.

Mr. Danon (Israel): Shame on you for not saying, "We condemn all acts of terror, period." That is what we are saying. We condemn all acts of terror. That is what I want you to say, Mr. Mansour. You are being translated into five languages. You can say it right now.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I ask the representative of Israel to continue with his statement.

Mr. Danon (Israel): Silence can be deafening, but in our region silence kills. It is time for the Palestinian leadership to end its silence and to start acting as leaders. Mr. Mansour, you cannot condemn terrorism, you cannot say it here: "I condemn all acts of terror." You cannot say it here. People are looking to you, Palestinian children are looking to you right now and you cannot say, "I condemn all acts of terrorism." One sentence you cannot say. One sentence you cannot say. Shame on you for that. Shame on you for not being able to say it.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): You are oppressing us. You are sitting on our lives. Leave us alone. Let my people be free.

Mr. Danon (Israel): Shame on you.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): Shame on you. You are the occupier. You are a colonizer.

Mr. Danon (Israel): We have heard your excuses, but we have not heard any condemnation.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): Leave us alone.

Mr. Danon (Israel): All of us, or maybe all of us, around this table know what it takes to be a leader. Leaders assume responsibility. Leaders speak out. Leaders educate. For the sake of the next generation, this is the lesson the Palestinians must learn. On the day Palestinian leaders, like Mr. Mansour, publicly condemn terror against Israelis — publicly — on the day they end their campaign of hate and violence, on the day respect for all — all — human beings is taught in Palestinian schools, on that day they will find a partner ready to work with them for the promise of peace. The State of Israel and the people of Israel continue to hope that that day will come soon.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I shall now give the floor to members of the Security Council.

I call on Mr. Murray McCully, Minister for Foreign Affairs of New Zealand.

Mr. McCully (New Zealand): I would like to start by thanking the Secretary-General for his comprehensive and realistic briefing.

Next Saturday, it will be two years since negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians were suspended. In the meantime, violence has escalated, the settlements have continued and trust between the two parties has been further eroded. And the Council has been largely a spectator.

It has been accepted wisdom in the Council, and in the eyes of the international community, that a two-State solution is the only path forward for resolving this matter. Yet today it is becoming increasingly apparent that such a solution may be moving beyond reach and that, if matters continue as they have for the past two years without action from the Council and others, the two-State solution will be dead. Against that background it is difficult to understand why the Security Council has not adopted a single resolution on this question in more than seven years, and that it could be a silent witness to the demise of the two-State solution.

What does the international community therefore expect of the Security Council in the difficult circumstances of today? First, it expects the Council to reassert a two-State solution as the only pathway to a secure and lasting peace. And it undoubtedly expects it to condemn the violence on both sides and the ongoing settlements programme as unacceptable obstacles to such a solution. Secondly, they expect the Council to support and give momentum to the work taking place outside the Council in the Quartet, among the members of the Arab League, and through the proposed French international conference. That work is necessary to rebuild confidence and trust and to prepare the parties for negotiations. And, thirdly, at the right time, they expect the Council to endorse a pathway back to negotiations, potentially through a resolution on parameters.

Opinions differ as to how some of those elements should be sequenced. In particular, there is debate as to whether a Council resolution focused on preserving a two-State solution, ending the violence and rhetoric and halting the settlements might best precede the proposed French conference or whether it might follow it. But I believe there is broad agreement on the content of those three phases.

When New Zealand proposed a draft text last year, in the absence of any alternatives, we were persuaded through the process of consultation that there was not enough support for it to succeed and that other processes in play might have been affected if the Council had acted at that time. However, the situation has deteriorated further and the threat to a two-State solution has become greater. Over the coming weeks, therefore, New Zealand will resume the conversation about the sequencing and content of a focused draft resolution as the views of the French representatives and the Quartet take greater shape. The efforts of those parties are vital, but they are not sufficient, and they cannot absolve the Council of its responsibility to lead. It is our absolute conviction that a Council resolution is an essential ingredient in the steps that lie ahead. The only issue is its timing and relationship to external processes. New Zealand would find it hard to understand how a draft text with the limited purpose and focus I have outlined could be too strong to be acceptable to other Council members.

Conversely, some others may be underwhelmed and want a more wide-ranging resolution. However, based on the careful soundings we have taken, our conclusion is that, in the current dire circumstances, maximalist positions would almost certainly fail and would serve only to consign the Council to continuing to preside in silence over the demise of the two-State solution. Our immediate task must be to preserve that ultimate goal and put the Council's weight behind the first steps on the path. I know that there are those who would rather the Council played no role and others who will assert that there are risks around a resolution at this time. But the greater risk by far is that the Council might do nothing at all as a two-State solution is pronounced dead and buried. New Zealand is therefore committed to seeing the Council decide on a clear plan over the coming weeks.

Between the work of the Quartet, the Arab League, the French initiative and others, there is a vitally important role for the Security Council. We will work with others to determine whether a draft resolution can best support the work of the Quartet, the French and the Arab ministers by being finalized before or after the other initiatives that are under way. However, whether

a Council initiative is concluded imminently or a little later in the year, we believe it will be useful to start discussions as soon as possible on a draft text and on synchronizing the Council's consideration with other parties and external initiatives.

We hope that by the time of the next Middle East debate in the Council, there will be greater clarity and unity about a way forward.

Mr. Danon (Israel): If I may, we just heard about a terror attack in Jerusalem in which a bus exploded and dozens of people are being evacuated. We expect to hear condemnation of that during today's discussion.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): Today we are holding a very solemn meeting of the Security Council, and I therefore urge everyone to abide by all the Council's provisional rules of procedure and keep order in the Chamber so as to reflect the seriousness of the question we are discussing. I expect all members present to observe that.

Mr. Pressman (United States of America): I would like to begin by thanking the Secretary-General for his briefing.

The commitment of the United States to peace in the Middle East and to advancing the vision of two States, living by side by side in peace, is unwavering. Many are rightly frustrated with the lack of progress, and we are too. We will continue to be steadfast in our support of efforts that will advance dialogue, peace and progress, and to oppose those that do not. Progress will be born out of hard choices made by both leaders with the aim of advancing the cause of peace over parochial politics. As such, we remain very concerned about the recent wave of terrorism and violence and about the utter lack of progress the parties have made towards a two-State solution. It is important that both sides demonstrate, through concrete policies and action, a genuine commitment to achieving a two-State solution in order to reduce tensions and restore hope in the possibility of peace.

What we have seen on the ground, and what people such as the Meir family present here today have experienced first-hand, is absolutely unconscionable. The recent spate of violence that has been going on for more than six months has included stabbings, shootings and vehicular attacks, including, as the Israeli Ambassador just noted, reports of a bus exploding in Jerusalem. Acts of terrorism have taken too many lives, including those of Americans. The victims have included soldiers and civilians, pregnant women and mothers, Israelis and Palestinians. That must come to an end. Let us be clear and unequivocal. There is no justification or rationalization for terrorism. Terrorism is terrorism. It is wrong, it is bloody and it must stop. Anyone who aspires to achieve a viable and independent Palestinian State must understand that engaging in incitement to violence serves only to undermine that goal. Only a political outcome, without violence, will enable that goal to be realized.

The United States continues to call on the Palestinian leadership, publicly and privately, to do everything possible to combat all forms of incitement and to explicitly condemn terrorist attacks. All perpetrators of violence should be brought to justice, and justice should be blind, fair and equal. We remain deeply concerned about the shooting on 24 March in Hebron of a Palestinian assailant by a member of the Israeli security forces, and we are closely following the legal proceedings against the accused perpetrator. We note that just today charges of manslaughter were brought against the soldier. It is critical that every possible effort be made to show restraint, guard against the unnecessary loss of life and de-escalate tensions. In cases where anyone from either side acts outside of the law, they must be held accountable.

As we have stated repeatedly, the United States strongly opposes settlement activity. It is incompatible with, and calls into question the Israeli Government's commitment to, two States. That is why we are deeply troubled that, since 1 January, there have been a number of Israeli declarations of State land in the West Bank, including expropriating approximately 600 acres south of Jericho and 250 acres south of Bethlehem. Just last week, the Government of Israel advanced the construction of hundreds of housing units in West Bank settlements in various stages of the planning process. Many of those units are located beyond the separation barrier deep within the West Bank. Those actions — the process of land expropriations, settlement expansions and the legalization of outposts — are wrong and fundamentally undermine the prospects for a two-State solution. Similarly, we are deeply troubled by the demolitions and evictions undertaken by the Israeli authorities in several locations throughout the West Bank and East Jerusalem. As we have repeatedly made clear, we continue to look to both sides to demonstrate

with actions and policies a genuine commitment to a two-State solution.

Nowhere are Palestinians suffering more than in Gaza, where the slow pace of reconstruction remains concerning. The stranglehold that Hamas wields over the population in Gaza forces the pace of reconstruction to stall further, as the taxes it levies and its diversion of construction materials leave Palestinians in Gaza with much less than they would otherwise have to rebuild their homes, communities and infrastructure. It was announced just today that the Israeli military discovered a tunnel extending into Israeli territory from Gaza 10 days ago. We all have an obligation to ensure that reconstruction materials are used for their intended purpose. We remain deeply concerned by the humanitarian conditions in Gaza. The United States provided an initial contribution of $43.4 million to the $403 million emergency appeal of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, for its operations in the West Bank and Gaza, and we thank those in the Council and within the international community who have made contributions. But far too few have stepped up with resources. We ask others to join the United States in meeting those vast needs. We note that the Government of Israel has expanded the Palestinian fishing zone off of Gaza's coast from six to nine nautical miles, which we hope will somewhat improve the livelihoods of Palestinian fishermen in Gaza.

Turning briefly to the political process, as the Quartet principals jointly stated in Munich in February, the status quo is unsustainable, and significant steps are urgently needed to stabilize the situation and reverse negative trends on the ground. Both sides must demonstrate through policies and actions a genuine commitment to a two-State solution in order to rebuild trust and avoid a cycle of escalation. We believe that the Quartet's upcoming report will help to inform international discussions on the best way to advance a two-State solution.

Turning now to the ongoing horrific situation in Syria, we welcome the third round of intra-Syrian talks, which resumed in Geneva last week, and thank Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura for his efforts. As resolution 2254 (2015) states, the only sustainable solution to the current crisis in Syria is through an inclusive and Syrian-led political process that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people, including through the establishment of an inclusive transitional governing body with full executive powers, which shall be formed on the basis of mutual consent while ensuring continuity of governmental institutions.

That is the heart of the effort undertaken by the International Syria Support Group and the process that Special Envoy De Mistura aims to move forward in Geneva. We are acutely aware that the Geneva talks and the situation on the ground in Syria are deeply interwoven. Success or failure in one area intimately affects the others. The stakes are enormous. And certainly with regard to both the cessation of hostilities and improving humanitarian access, more can and must be done. The cessation of hostilities is holding in parts of the country and has improved the day-to-day reality of numerous Syrians' lives in those areas, but violations continue. We remain particularly disturbed by the regime's ongoing attacks on parties to the cessation of hostilities. Those violations not only harm and kill Syrian civilians, but also place great strain on other parties to the cessation of hostilities, many of whom have made great efforts to show restraint. The regime's behaviour will only strengthen the position of groups like Jabhat Al-Nusra that consistently try to undermine the cessation of hostilities. We continue to press the opposition to resist being drawn into violence as a result of Jabhat Al-Nusra and regime actions. We have urged the opposition to maintain compliance with the cessation of hostilities. There must be a halt in the escalating violence in Aleppo and in other areas, including Latakia, Hama and the suburbs of Damascus, where recent events pose a serious threat to the durability of the agreement.

To understand the human dimensions of violations to the cessation of hostilities, I want to say just a word about Dr. Hassan Al-Araj, a respected cardiologist in the norther part of Hama, who was killed in an air strike last week. As of today, there are very few doctors left in Hama, and there are no cardiologists. Hearts that need care will have no one.

Once again, the Syrian regime needs to end the killing and the violence, and it needs to do much more with regard to humanitarian access in besieged and hard-to-reach areas. Of the 4.1 million Syrians in hard-to-reach locations, the United Nations has been permitted to reach just 249,000 this year — 249,000 out of 4.1 million, or little more than 6 per cent of those in hard-to-reach areas. The main reason for that is clear: the deliberate obstruction by the Syrian regime, including disputing the United Nations population figures as a

new mechanism to prohibit aid from reaching starving populations. The regime deployed that new strategy in the Damascus suburbs of Arbeen, Zamalka and Zabadin, as all three regions had been approved for assistance delivery but were stalled as the United Nations had to renegotiate with the Syrian regime exactly how many people were in need of assistance. Instead of feeding people, the United Nations is forced to negotiate and renegotiate exactly how many starving people will be fed. For those trapped within the besieged areas, where people are intentionally starved and maliciously denied access to international assistance, of the 486,000 people in 18 besieged locations the United Nations has been allowed to reach only 12 locales and 152,500 people. We must do better, and we must do so quickly because people are literally starving to death.

As such, we commend the United Nations efforts in the recent successful airlift of food supplies for the approximately 4,000 residents in Deir ez-Zor besieged by Da'esh, while noting the remaining challenge to address the needs of all 200,000 in the city. We also hope that the recent United Nations trip to Darayya will lead to the immediate delivery of assistance to its people, who have not received one crumb of aid since 2012. The world is witnessing an intentional massive starvation campaign in real time. All actors, including the regime, need to allow food to reach people who are literally dying for it.

We once again call on the Syrian regime to comply with international law, including resolution 2254 (2015) and the demands of the international community, to allow assistance to reach all Syrians in need. The next steps in Syria are as urgent as they are clear. There must be a permanent cessation of hostilities, full humanitarian access and an end to the violence, and all Member States must support the political transition in Syria.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing and for his commitment.

The Oslo Accords, signed in 1994, at a time of great hope, made the establishment of a Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security with Israel the key to the resolution of that historic conflict. Nevertheless, let us be frank. More than 20 years after those agreements, the creation of a Palestinian State has never been as remote. The daily progression of Israeli settlement activity, which parcels up Palestinian territory so as to reduce it to a small portion, calls into question the viability of a future State.

Violence structures relations between Israelis and Palestinians, whether in acts of terrorism, individual attacks or simply the weight of occupation. The wave of violence with increasing intensity that has persisted for six months has led to hundreds of deaths and thousands of wounded. The rift between the Palestinian and Israeli peoples is unprecedented. It fuels the radicalization of public opinion; people seem to no longer believe in the possibility of the peaceful coexistence of two States. That is one of the most worrisome aspects. We must make no mistake against that backdrop. The status quo is an illusion; the status quo is mechanically a regression, that daily takes us farther and farther away from the possibility of one day seeing a two-State solution emerge. We must look squarely at the harsh reality on the ground. If nothing is done, the tenuous prospects for a two-State solution will disappear and the risk of generalized violence will once again be reinforced.

Given that undeniable observation, France's message for several months now can be summarized in a single sentence: there is crucial need to create a credible political horizon to save the two-State solution, as that solution is the only one that responds to the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinians for a State and Israel for security.

As demonstrated by the ongoing implacable nature of the conflict, we know there can be no easy solutions. However, the choice of not dealing with the matter, or searching for ways to act to manage or contain the conflict, is not that of my country. France believes that we must all undertake our responsibility to act and, when the time is right, to do so through the Security Council. Given the scope of the challenge, we think that collective mobilization of the international community is today the only way to move forward. Under the leadership of President of the Republic and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, France has decided to launch an initiative to provide a credible political horizon for the peace process. It is a cooperative, inclusive and progressive approach.

First, it is cooperative. To that end, the Special Envoy of France, Ambassador Pierre Vimont, conducted broad, in-depth consultations with the parties and the international and regional stakeholders to formulate proposals. The approach, then, was inclusive, as I noted. The initiative is complementary to the actions

conducted by the Quartet, the United Nations and the United States. Given the difficult task before us, we will indeed need the commitment of all stakeholders if we hope to succeed. Finally, the initiative is progressive. Given the rift between the parties, it would be illusory to think there would be an immediate resumption of negotiations. Our goal is therefore based on the priority of halting the negative spiral and taking the necessary decisions so as to safeguard the two-State solution, to recreate on that basis a positive political dynamic.

As was announced by the President of the Republic in Cairo, France itself proposes to organize in Paris in early June a ministerial meeting, notably by gathering the members of the Quartet, the permanent members of the Security Council and the Arab League, as well as other regional and European stakeholders. The meeting would have three objectives.

First, as I mentioned, it would be to reaffirm the support of the international community to the two-State solution and the major principles of conflict resolution. We will be guided by the Quartet's report, which will provide one of the foundations of our actions.

Secondly, an objective would be to focus on garnering specific commitments by the international community. To implement those ends, we will establish working groups so as to produce a comprehensive package of incentives that could decidedly engender a special European partnership, the reaffirmation of the Arab Peace Initiative, as well as economic and security guarantees.

Thirdly, the objective would be to define a timetable with specific goals as well as the methodology for an international conference, which we would like to convene in the fall. The objective of the conference would be to provide a foundation for relaunching the process of credible negotiations within an internationally agreed upon framework.

Since resolution 181 (II), adopted by the General Assembly in 1947, the two-State solution has been the shared guideline for the Organization. France is aware of the difficulty of the challenge; it is a conflict where so much goodwill has failed. We, however, believe that is our collective responsibility not to give up. We must never give up. Our ambition is not claiming that we alone are able succeed where others have failed. No, France's idea is to be a link and to make available our experience and relationships with the parties in the region so as to energize the emergence of a consensual approach. That method is demanding, but at the same time we believe it is the best way to make solid progress and to create the conditions conducive to forging credible negotiations.

With regard to the situation in Syria, France welcomed the resumption of intra-Syrian talks in Geneva on 13 April under the aegis of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General. Mr. Staffan de Mistura enjoys our full support in his ongoing mediation efforts. We also welcome the constructive approach of the opposition, which is engaged in the Geneva negotiations despite provocations from the regime.

We welcome the stated objective of the resumption of talks concerning the decisive question, among others, of the political transition and negotiations with the regime. The high negotiating committee should lead to the terms of a compromise for the implementation of the Geneva communiqué (S/2013/522, annex), in particular a transition authority within the next six months, paving the way for the drafting of a new Constitution by the Syrian people and the holding of elections in free and fair conditions within 18 months. Half measures or unilateral arrangements, which the regime might announce, following fake elections would have no value, as they would not be the outcome of an agreement with the opposition, pursuant to resolution 2254 (2015).

We deplore the worsening situation in the Syrian territory in recent weeks with the observed increase in attacks by the regime. Those practices demonstrate that the regime continues those atrocities and violates the cessation of hostilities, thereby seeking to undermine the efforts of the international community for a political solution. Without a political solution, we know there can be no sustainable peace in Syria.

Finally, hand in hand with the cessation of hostilities, France believes that the full, safe and unhindered access, without any preconditions, to humanitarian assistance to those in the population impacted is a top priority. The Syrian regime and Da'esh bear significant responsibility in the matter. Again, strengthened and effective pressure should be exerted on the regime. Those actions of the Syrian regime that undermine the Geneva negotiations must cease.

Allow me say a few words about Yemen, to express our hope that the delegations will soon meet around the negotiations table for the resumption of talks scheduled to resume today, Monday, 18 April. The resumption of negotiations could give rise to genuine

hope. We hope that the Security Council can rapidly send a clear message to the parties to support this new dynamic and to provide full support to the work of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General. The hope for the future of Yemen needs especially to be encouraged and supported, given the fact that the humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate. Furthermore, the terrorist threat in Yemen is increasing every day. The Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula group and Da'esh are taking advantage of the instability to spread their influence across the country. A good-faith commitment on the part of the parties to the conflict to a political settlement in Yemen and a clear commitment by the Security Council are therefore all the more urgent.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Sometimes we hear that, given the numerous other crises, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has lost its significance in the context of efforts to maintain international peace and security. We categorically disagree with that point of view. Efforts aimed at solving the Palestinian-Israeli issue should be bolstered. We believe that the primary task today is to create conditions conducive to the revival of the negotiations.

The situation on the ground remains tense and fraught with new spates of violence. Since October 2015, there have been more than 200 Palestinian victims and more than 30 Israeli victims of the confrontations. Against that worrisome backdrop, the Israeli Government has continued its policy of faits accomplis, building settlements, confiscating land, demolishing Palestinian homes and jeopardizing the two-State solution.

In that context, it is more important than ever that the international community send a clear message to prevent the unleashing of new spirals of violence and to underscore the need for a swift resumption of the negotiations. The leading role in guiding the situation back to the political-diplomatic front should be played by the international mediators of the Middle East Quartet.

The ministerial meetings of the Quartet held in Vienna in October 2015 and in Munich in February 2016, which were convened upon Russia's initiative, were aimed at bringing the parties back to constructive actions so as to normalize the situation and make progress in the achievement of sustainable and mutually acceptable agreements based on well-known international law. We hope that the upcoming report of the Quartet will provide an objective analysis of the situation on the ground and recommendations to the parties. We also hope that it will help to defuse tensions and provide a political horizon for a settlement.

Neither can we forget about Gaza. The humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip remains exceedingly difficult, and at any time it could slide into another dangerous crisis. If progress cannot be achieved in resolving the problems in the Gaza Strip, overcoming the embargo and rebuilding the infrastructure destroyed by Israel in the summer of 2014, repeat clashes cannot be ruled out.

The issue of achieving Palestinian unity is particularly important in reviving the peace process. We welcome the meetings among representatives of Fatah and Hamas held in Doha and Cairo in February and March to discuss the formation of a Government of national unity and the holding of presidential and parliamentary elections. Despite the difficulties in the negotiations between Fatah and Hamas, we continue to lend our assistance in overcoming the inter-Palestinian split.

We appreciate the efforts of all members of the international community aimed at achieving a comprehensive, fair and lasting solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. However, such steps and initiatives must be clearly calibrated and aimed at specific results. The primary criterion for assessing the usefulness of such efforts to restart the negotiations is a clear understanding of their added value.

We share the deep discomfort of most members of the Security Council with regard to the Council's inaction in our efforts to settle the crisis between Israel and Palestine. Indeed, the most recent Security Council document on that issue was presidential statement S/PRST/2009/14, adopted upon Russia's initiative in 2009. In 2011, there was a veto by the United States on the draft resolution contained in document S/2011/24, on the issue of settlements, and, in 2014, there was an abstention — or hidden veto — on the draft resolution contained in document S/2014/916. On the latter occasion, there were two votes against and five abstentions, but essentially what happened was that everything was done to block the draft resolution and to not allow the Security Council's view on that topic to be heard. In each of those cases, the Russian Federation voted in favour. Of course, that is not a very impressive result in the Council's work. The Council must do more, including to implement Russia's initiative on the

organization of a Security Council visit to the Middle East.

With regard to Syria, we believe it is necessary to use the cessation of hostilities in the country and the inter-Syrian dialogue in Geneva under United Nations auspices to reach a lasting political settlement. In that context, we are pleased with the launching of a second round of talks, mediated by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura. We will continue to provide assistance to the Syrian armed forces in countering international armed terrorist groups, such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and the Al-Nusra Front. We attach great importance to the activities of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) task forces on the ceasefire and humanitarian access.

We believe the statement delivered today on this matter by the representative of the United States was unbalanced, unobjective and counterproductive.

We believe that success can be achieved through an ongoing and productive inter-Syrian dialogue, in accordance with the provisions of the Geneva communiqué of 2012 (S/2012/522, annex), the decisions of the ISSG and resolution 2254 (2015). All sectors of Syrian society who have not dirtied their hands with terrorist activities, including Kurds, should participate in the dialogue. We once again underscore the need for the delegation of the opposition in Geneva to be truly representative and not to base its participation in the negotiations on preconditions. We believe that there should be a comprehensive, objective and de-politicized approach to humanitarian issues. That is the only way they can be solved in an effective and lasting manner.

We call for the establishment of a comprehensive ceasefire in Yemen among all the parties to the conflict. We think that the new round of negotiations should begin without unjustified delays. We consider it important to ensure unhindered humanitarian access and to lift embargoes of any type. The swift normalization of the situation with regard to entry points for commercial cargo, first and foremost carrying food, water and medicine, will significantly alleviate the suffering of the Yemeni people.

The situation in Libya remains complex and uncertain. Efforts to restore unity, based on the Skhirat political agreement, are moving too slowly. That is no surprise, recalling that foreign intervention clearly dealt a hard blow to Libya's statehood. Meanwhile, terrorists are expanding into strategically important regions of the country, and the socioeconomic and humanitarian problems are becoming worse. Nonetheless, the solution can only be Libyan-led. That requires the continuation of the patient work carried out under the auspices of the United Nations to garner the participation in the dialogue of all influential forces from all regions of the country. That is why we were puzzled by the recent decision of the European Union to include on its sanctions list some key participants in the political process. That approach could further entrench inter-Libyan antagonisms.

In order to effectively assist Libyans, including in countering the burgeoning threat of terrorism, there is a need for due coordination of initiatives with the full participation of regional players. However, some information suggests that certain international partners might have a hidden agenda in Libya. There is a need to help, but only within the framework of international law, so that in the years to come we do not have to regret the mistakes made.

The difficult situation in the Middle East and North Africa, political and military turbulence, deep social and economic strains, as well as the widening sphere of influence of terrorist groups and worsening standards of living for the masses, require calibrated collective work to be carried out in order to stabilize the region. The Security Council should play the most important role in those efforts.

Mr. Ramírez Carreño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): We are grateful for the briefing by the Secretary-General on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

Our delegation aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

The Middle East continues to be affected by a complex political reality — the product of war, foreign interference and terrorism — all of which are the direct result of military interventionism and the lack of a political agreement to resolve the region's conflicts. The deadlock in the peace process between Israel and Palestine represents the primary obstacle to the stability of the region. For that reason, we will focus our remarks on that issue.

In the complex scenario of the region, the solution of the issue of Israel's occupation of Palestine remains deadlocked in terms of the political process, while at the same time the occupying Power is deepening its colonization of Palestinian land. Such actions continue apace in the light of the apathy of the Security Council, which is making no effort to demand that Israel cease its acts of violence against the Palestinian population and end its illegal expansionist and settlement policies on Palestinian land. There can be no doubt that this inactivity on the part of the Council is fuelling the impunity with which Israel acts, as it continues to commit a whole range of acts of aggression against Palestinian men, women and children.

We would like to highlight some of the major serious obstacles to the two-State solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict. The prolonged Israeli occupation has been exploited to consolidate the settlement policy on Palestinian territory. By way of illustration, look no further than the support of the Israeli Government for the settlers, which increased in 2015 compared with the figures for previous years. It is noteworthy that during the first three months of 2016, settlement construction increased 250 per cent compared with the same period of the previous year. All of this is reflected in the expansion of the illegal occupation of the territory: today there are more than 650,000 settlers living in more than 260 settlements in the West Bank, including neighbourhoods in East Jerusalem. To this we would add the seizure of Palestinian land, which is carried out by the simple proclamation by the Israeli authorities declaring such land State land or State property.

In addition to the settlement policy, let me stress that the Israelis are continuing to demolish houses, in some cases on the baseless excuse of the lack of a building permit by the Palestinians. In other instances, the Israelis use the pretext of applying collective punishment to Palestinian families for crimes alleged to have been committed by certain members of those families.

As a result of these abusive practices, between January and April 2016 the Israeli authorities demolished 586 houses or structures of other kinds in vulnerable communities in the region, particularly in the area known as Area C. Their actions left more than 700 individuals homeless. The occupying Power does not seem to care that many of the buildings destroyed were constructed thanks to international support and seems indifferent to the fact that many demolitions are carried out in areas where Palestinian families live in poverty, and that being left homeless means that they have no choice but to swell the ranks of refugees. Israeli settlements are illegal, and the Security Council should be able to muster the political unity necessary to condemn them, as the entire international community hopes to see it do.

The situation of violence in the country is also extremely sad, and it is sad to hear the victims' personal stories of violence. But we have to make sure to put the situation in the proper context. We could fill this Chamber with the victims of violence in Palestine. We could fill the General Assembly Hall. This is just to try to give the Council an idea of what is happening in Palestine and of its scale and magnitude.

The origin of all this suffering is the illegal occupation by Israel. The situation of violence in the occupied territories is worrisome owing to the ongoing criminal actions of the occupying Power against the inhabitants of Palestine, under the pretext of the need to increase security to respond to the acts committed by Palestinians targeting Israelis. Our country unequivocally condemns such acts. However, because we understand that the root cause of the violence is the Israeli occupation of Palestine, and given the differences in strength between Israel and Palestine, we denounce with even greater vigour the disproportionate response, including administrative detention, collective punishment and extrajudicial executions, of the occupying Power against the Palestinian population.

In a similar vein, we denounce administrative detentions, which violate human rights and which have been increasing to include even minors. Reports indicate that 78 per cent of the Palestinians held in Israeli detention facilities, that is, almost 5,400 individuals, including 264 minors, are considered to be prisoners for security reasons and thus suffer conditions that are harsher than those of the prison population in general.

Arbitrary arrests of Palestinians by Israel are often linked to torture and abuse by the occupying Power. A recently published report indicates that of the 149 Palestinians murdered by the Israeli Defence Forces in 2015, 77 were killed during incidents related to attacks against Israel, whereas the other 72 died as the result of disproportionate action and aggression by the occupying Power at checkpoints, while it was cracking down on protests or carrying out routine operations. In many of these cases, the victims did not pose any threat

whatsoever to the security or the well-being of the repressive authorities. We urge that all those involved in such crimes targeting innocent and defenceless citizens stand trial and hope that the day will come when impunity ends and Israel will be held accountable.

Faced with this pattern of systemic violence targeting the Palestinians, we urge the Council to take account of the call to establish an international protection system for the Palestinian population in the occupied territories, in line with the Fourth Geneva Convention and resolution 904 (1994). In that framework, and as we have previously suggested in this body, we could consider contemplating a presence by the humanitarian agencies of the United Nations system that are already deployed in Palestine. Within the limits of their specific competencies, they could play a protection-of-civilians role.

The humanitarian situation in Gaza continues to be delicate, as a result of the blockade and siege to which the population has been subjected since 2007. This latter step exacerbates the military aggression perpetrated by Israel during Operation Defensive Shield in 2014, which took the lives of 2,251 Palestinians, including 1,462 civilians and 551 children.

International efforts for the reconstruction of Gaza have been hampered by lack of cooperation on the part of Israel and the continued blockade. The repair and rebuilding of houses, schools, hospitals and service infrastructures are seriously undermined by Israeli restrictions on the entry and exit of goods and materials to and from Gaza, as well as the threat of fresh attacks and destruction by Israel. Israel must lift the inhumane blockade to which it is subjecting the people of Palestine and Gaza, which is a clear violation of international humanitarian law.

We believe that the Palestinian question is one of the most egregious failures of the Security Council. The Council has deceived the millions of Palestinians who, for more than 60 years, have trusted it to take action as the guarantor of international peace and security in the quest for a solution to the conflict. Nonetheless, the occupation and the settlement process in the Palestinian territory not only persists but continues to expand, taking many lives and causing unremitting violence in the region.

Palestine is the victim of one of the most serious tragedies and injustices in modern history. Certain members of the Council are directly responsible for the inaction of this body in the face of this tragedy. We are wondering how long the Palestinian people must wait. Why does the Security Council sit by silently and allow the mass violation of human rights and international humanitarian law by Israel? Why does the Security Council maintain double standards on this matter? How many more Palestinian children must die before the Council reacts?

This issue can be resolved only on the political track, and we therefore welcome all of the efforts currently under way on various fronts to breathe new life into the peace process, which has been moribund for more than 20 years now. We will consider in good faith and in a constructive spirit any initiative that would allow us to make headway in negotiations conducive to rekindling peace negotiations on an equal footing between Palestinians and Israelis and based on a political, negotiated and inclusive solution that would bring a definitive end to the conflict in the framework of the two-State solution, with full acceptance of the right of the Palestinian people to live within internationally recognized borders, in line with the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council. All of these represent the key elements in the negotiations. They cannot be changed. We must avoid any action on the ground that could threaten the two-State solution. We believe that all the initiatives, such as that of the Quartet, the Arab League Initiative and the French initiative, must adhere to those principles in order to achieve a positive outcome.

Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to begin by conveying the condolences of Spain to the Permanent Missions of Japan and Ecuador in the light of the very high number of victims resulting from the earthquakes that struck both countries over the weekend. We would also like to begin this statement by condemning all acts of terrorism wherever they take place.

I will begin by referring to the Palestinian issue, and subsequently will turn to the latest events in Yemen, Syria and in Lebanon. I will try to abide by the five-minute rule.

A few months ago, in October, we held an open debate on the situation in the Middle East (see S/PV.7540) under Spain's presidency of the Security Council. That was at the beginning of the terrible wave of violence, which has continued all this time. In recent

weeks the violence seemed to have attenuated, even if today the news is not that good.

A point that we have made on many occasions is one that we think needs repeating now: setting a political timeline of hope is the only way to put a permanent end to the violence and move towards a solution to the conflict. It is the only way whereby we can ensure the security of Israel on a sustained basis. Setting a timeline that will bring hope in its wake is essential and urgent, because the viability of the two-State solution is at risk.

In last October's open debate, Spain made the point that the international community must be fully involved in the solution to the conflict, and that we could do that through an international conference that would relaunch the peace process and prevent the demise of the two-State solution. We therefore support the efforts currently being made by France to convene an international conference on the peace process. We believe that that needs to be the priority at this juncture, including here in the Security Council.

We also agree with the point that the Security Council has a key role to play in defending the two-State solution. We bear a responsibility for that. But we have to tread very carefully in deciding how we are going to fulfil that responsibility, and make sure that we prioritize a course of action that holds out a genuine possibility of making headway at the present time towards breathing new life into the peace process. Moreover, as I have just indicated, we believe that that means choosing a particular course of action, namely, the holding of an international conference. Such action is fully complementary to the work of the Quartet, particularly to its initiative of drafting a report about the situation on the ground and about the viability of the two-State solution.

We trust that once that report has been submitted, it will serve to provide guidance for the subsequent action on the part of the Security Council to address the issue and find such a solution, one that the entire international community yearns for and that will uphold the two-State solution. The involvement of the international community does not mean in any way that the parties to the conflict cannot be involved. If they truly yearn for peace, they must work to foster the appropriate conditions on the ground for a return to negotiations. They therefore must avoid any action that could imperil the two-State solution.

The construction of settlements in the occupied territories is the most blatant example of such an action. It is illegal under international law and constitutes one of the main threats to the feasibility of the two-State solution going forward. The Security Council has repeatedly spoken of the illegal nature of the settlements. It is a point that we have expressed loud and clear on various occasions, including in resolutions 446 (1979) and 465 (1980).

Secondly, Israel must put an immediate halt to the demolitions, the forced evictions of people and the seizure of land. Israel must also adopt transformative measures to rebuild the necessary climate of trust in order to preserve the two-State solution.

Thirdly, irrespective of all that I have just said on those points, I think it is also worth underscoring once again our robust and unequivocal rejection of violence, echoing a point that I made at the beginning of this statement: such violence can never be justified. In particular, acts of terrorism must be condemned once again by all of us robustly and categorically — such acts constitute terrorism, in any situation, under any circumstances, anywhere. Both parties must refrain from any incitement to violence and must refrain from the disproportionate use of force.

Finally, I think it would be remiss of me not to make the point that intra-Palestinian reconciliation is also key if we are to move forward in the peace process. We hope that the talks held in Doha between Hamas and Fatah will provide an opportunity for both parties to abide by previous agreements, thus ensuring that we can restore the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority over Gaza and set a course for elections.

I will now turn to the matter of Yemen. The parties to the conflict have finally agreed to a ceasefire, which we hope will last and become permanent. That will then mean that we have a window of opportunity to mitigate the terrible humanitarian suffering in that country.

Direct negotiations were scheduled to commence today. However, we have learned that they have been postponed, but we hope that such a delay will not be repeated in the future. We would like to reiterate our support for the efforts of the United Nations Special Envoy for Yemen in ensuring that the talks go ahead and that they lead to an inclusive solution that will guarantee the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Yemen.

Turning to Syria, seven weeks have now gone by since the cessation of hostilities came into effect. We have just begun the second round of the so-called proximity talks in Geneva. Nonetheless, we are seeing — and we are worried about this — an escalation of clashes, which is threatening to derail resolution 2268 (2016). The lack of progress on the humanitarian track is also an indication of the fragility of the process. For that reason, we urge all the parties to the conflict to immediately halt attacks targeting all those forces that have agreed to the cessation of hostilities agreement. We call for a robust commitment to the negotiation process to lead us towards a political transition in the talks taking place in Geneva. Finally, we call for full respect for international humanitarian law by all parties. In particular, we call on the Government of Syria to urgently review its policy on the provision of medical equipment to the besieged areas.

Finally, with regard to Lebanon, I would like to thank the Secretary-General for the information that he has made available to us and his commitment to Lebanon, which was made abundantly clear during his recent trip to that country. I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute once again to the people of Lebanon, who have demonstrated an understanding of their responsibility and the need for social solidarity, which serve as an example and a model. They have provided their hospitality to an extraordinary number of refugees.

At the same, I must express our concern about the institutional deadlock that has racked that country for too long now. It is of the utmost importance that the political forces in Lebanon arrive, as quickly as possible, at an agreement that will allow for the election of a new President.

Mr. Ibrahim (Malaysia): I thank you, Mr. President, for presiding over this open debate.

On behalf of the people and the Government of Malaysia, I would like to take this opportunity to convey our deepest condolences to the families and loved ones of victims of the earthquakes that struck Ecuador and Japan over the weekend. We wish godspeed to the recovery and assistance efforts.

Like Spain and Venezuela, we too condemn all acts of violence.

My delegation warmly welcomes the presence of His Excellency Mr. Murray McCully, Minister for Foreign Affairs of New Zealand, and His Excelelncy Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations, at this meeting.

We thank the Secretary-General for his briefing, which we listened to very carefully. We completely agree with the message conveyed by the Secretary-General and by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of New Zealand. The current situation in the occupied Palestinian territory is not sustainable and requires urgent action by the Council.

Malaysia aligns itself with the statements to be delivered by the representatives of Iran and Kuwait on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and the Organization of Islamic Conference, respectively.

For the purpose of today's open debate, my delegation wishes to focus solely on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. There are two main reasons for that. First, of the issues pertaining to the Middle East, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been on the United Nations agenda for the longest period. It is as old as the United Nations itself. And, whether we wish to admit it or not, the protracted Palestinian question is the nucleus that has triggered various other threats to international peace and security.

Secondly, unlike all other Middle East conflicts, there is no recent Council action on the question of Palestine. The last time a Council resolution was adopted was more than seven years ago, which belies the worsening situation on the ground and the rising threats to the two-State solution. Worst of all, there is simply no political will by the Council to act to bring an end to Israel's illegal occupation and to salvage the two-State solution, in accordance with international law, the values and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and international human rights standards. There is also a clear lack of appetite by the Council to use the tools at its disposal on the issue of Palestine, unlike with regard to Syria, Lebanon and Yemen. Therefore, Malaysia is of the view that this issue deserves our undivided attention at this meeting.

Malaysia strongly condemns the extrajudicial killings perpetrated by Israeli forces against Palestinians, including children and women. The cold-blooded murder of a Palestinian youth by an Israeli soldier in Hebron — the youth was shot in the head as he lay injured on the ground — is a clear instance of Israel's shoot-to-kill policy. Tragically, if not for the fact that the incident was captured on video, it would

have been treated as another act of self-defence by the Israeli army, and the perpetrator would have gotten away with murder. Even if the incident is investigated by the Israeli authorities, we remain sceptical as to whether justice will be served, as only 3 per cent of criminal investigations into violence committed by the Israeli forces and settlers have resulted in indictments.

The facts on the ground surrounding the murder proved that it was not an isolated incident. If it had been an isolated incident, the Israeli forces would not have reacted by storming the family home of the person who had filmed the incident in order to harass and intimidate him. Israeli settlers would not have reacted by gathering outside that same house to threaten him. The Israeli medical staff present at the scene would not have remained indifferent to the injured Palestinian, even when he was shot in the head right in front of them. And the Israeli soldier who pulled the trigger would not have received the support of over half of Israelis, as recorded by an opinion poll.

That incident reflects the culmination of a long-standing systematic policy that dehumanizes the Palestinians, one perpetuated by an unconstrained culture of impunity. It is an ideology of violent extremism, sanctioned by the occupying Power and institutionalized in Israeli society and its political, military and judicial institutions. In other words, this is what we sow by our inaction. This is what the Palestinians reap in a tragically horrifying manner.

Another unfortunate consequence of our inaction and the prevailing impunity is the rapid expansion of illegal Israeli settlements. This year, Israel continued with its settlement construction, land confiscations and forced evictions, depriving Palestinians of their property and shelter and rendering hundreds of Palestinians — including children — homeless. As reported by the Israeli non-governmental organization Peace Now, the building of illegal Israeli settlements increased by 250 per cent in the first quarter of this year, as compared to the same period last year. Over the years, Israeli authorities have taken over more than 85 per cent of the total area of the historical land of Palestine.

The construction of the apartheid wall also continues unabated, against the decision of the International Court of Justice in 2004. The latest construction in Bethlehem's Cremisan Valley will severely restrict the access of nearly 60 Palestinian families to their agricultural land and devastate their livelihood. Slowly but surely, the illegal settlement activities and the apartheid wall are undermining and fragmenting the contiguity and territorial integrity of Palestine, including East Jerusalem, and physically threaten the viability of and prospects for the two-State solution.

On the situation in Gaza, as mentioned by the Secretary-General, we are deeply concerned about Israel's latest ban on building materials to reconstruct thousands of damaged and destroyed homes and infrastructure. Two years after Israel's military offensive in Gaza, as many as 75,000 Palestinians remain homeless. The international community must act to end the illegal and inhumane blockade of Gaza, as it constitutes the main obstacle to reconstruction and a form of collective punishment that grossly violates international standards of human rights.

Malaysia reiterates the need for the Council to use all tools at its disposal on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, just as in the case of Syria, Lebanon and Yemen. We must end the impunity with which Israel acts by increasing the price to maintain the status quo in occupied Palestine. The end of apartheid in South Africa did not come about through the international community merely standing by and doing nothing. Instead, the international community chose to take effective action by increasing the political, economic and social costs, thereby opposing discriminatory and unjust policies that violated the international standard of human rights. The situation in occupied Palestine is much worse.

The most burning issues that require our urgent action are the illegal settlements, the blockade of Gaza, and the need for international protection for the occupied Palestinian people, in line with international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention. As mentioned in the latest report (A/HRC/31/73) of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, a protective presence for Palestinians is needed against the effects of Israeli policies and practices related to the occupation.

For seven years, the Council debated and produced nothing. For seven years, it bore witness to the many atrocities. For seven years, the Council procrastinated, with disastrous consequences. Meanwhile, during those seven years, more blood has been shed, more walls of

hatred have been built, more hopes have been dashed and society has been dehumanized.

We speak today to clear our conscience — doing nothing is not right. We have no quarrel with Israel, the Jewish State or its right to exist. We never have. Our prayer is for Israel to live up to the commandment to love thy neighbour, and stop the atrocities. However, we are left with no choice but to urge the Council to begin to bear witness to good tidings, to use the tools at its disposal, salvage the two-State solution and bring justice and peace to these troubled lands.

Mr. Lucas (Angola): First of all, we would like to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his briefing on the situation in the Middle East, a deeply destabilized region where conflicts rage and where finding solutions to the conflicts has been a tragic, failed endeavour. We welcome the Minister for Foreign Affairs of New Zealand, Mr. Murray McCully, and thank him for his thoughtful insights.

We endorse the statement to be made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

As Security Council members and States Members of the United Nations meet once again for this statutory quarterly debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, the overall political climate in the region has shown some signs of progress, however weak or elusive. The deal closed in 2015 with the adoption of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on the Iranian nuclear programme was undeniably a landmark in a region where diplomacy has been unable to score any meaningful success in the last quarter of a century. The glimpse of hope that we now witness in the region, with some apparent progress in the search of political solutions to the conflicts in Syria and Yemen, is, we hope, more than a residual by-product of the agreement reached with Iran and the understanding among great and regional Powers in solving that extremely complex issue.

Political will and determination were instrumental to reaching a solution. It is our view that now great and regional Powers must build on the agreement with Iran and make it a real game-changer. In particular, the regional Powers should set aside their rivalries, stop fuelling conflicts in the region and take into account the wake-up call of terrorism at their very doorstep. We furthermore think that it is incumbent upon world and regional Powers to share responsibility and use their leverage to solve the outstanding conflicts in the Middle East, which are a major source of international friction and human suffering on an unbearable scale and an affront to any moral standards.

The Middle East has been a breeding ground for terrorism. In last week's open debate (see S/PV.7670) on threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts a consensus was reiterated that terrorism and violent extremism are global threats that transcend cultures and geographical boundaries. In order to effectively counter this rising threat, we must base our actions on the shared values embodied in the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international human rights law and humanitarian law. Unfortunately, these basic principles are violated time and time again, resulting in failure to build a world order based on the rule of law and the peaceful coexistence among nations and peoples.

This state of affairs hampers the capacity to effectively address such drivers of violent extremism as the lack of proactive and just engagement with key communities focusing on conflict prevention and resolving long-standing grievances in conflict situations. One such long-standing conflict, which is an unfortunate example of the international community's shared incapacity to find a just and lasting solution, is the conflict in Palestine.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has become a most painful and divisive issue since the prospects of reaching a solution seem to be further and further away. The heavy-handed and discriminatory strategies employed by the Israeli Government have been revealed to be counterproductive by further alienating the two communities and fuelling radical and extremist elements on both sides. We note with concern that the reconciliation talks held recently between Fatah, Hamas and other Palestinian factions reached no consensus on the Palestinian issue. We regret the Palestinian divide, as it hampers the ability of the Palestinians to engage constructively in a search for peace, while the rhetoric of incitement to violence becomes an additional element detrimental to the prospects for peace.

However, the reality is that Israel is the occupying Power, and its tactics continuously undermine the possibility of a two-State solution that meets the international community consensus as the most realistic and appropriate way to find a just and long-lasting solution to the conflict. The unreasonable way that

the Israeli Defence Forces deal with the Palestinians, including arbitrary arrests and detentions, the targeting of civilian social infrastructure, collective punishment action through home demolitions, rendering Palestinian families homeless and destitute and, most damaging of all, the continuing settlement expansion, are clear demonstrations of a systematic unwillingness to facilitate the return to negotiations and the resolution of the conflict based on two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

The report recently issued by the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process underscores that the demolition of Palestinian homes and livelihood structures more than doubled in the reporting period, and that the demolitions as of mid-April already exceed the total of the previous year. On numerous occasions, Security Council members have stressed the illegality of settlement activity and expansion while agreeing that they constitute the single most damaging factor to a viable Palestinian State. Despite such judgments, some relevant members of the Security Council, while expressing condemnation of such practices, do not use their leverage upon Israel to stop the settlement expansion, which is in flagrant violation of international standards of human rights and international law.

Since we joined the Security Council in 2015, there have been a number of initiatives, namely, the revitalization of the Middle East Quartet, proposals addressing the issue, including consultations with both sides, the convening of an international support group, the French initiative to hold an international conference to restart talks, considering the option of international protection for the Palestinian people, and pursuing legal, diplomatic and economic means to make it too costly for Israel to continue with its illegal settlement policies. However, none of these proposals were accepted or followed through upon.

This systematic lack of direct and unified action by the international community and by the Security Council deliberately sidelines the issue and has continually diminished prospects for a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We call upon the Security Council to uphold international law, fulfil its duties to advance a solution for the conflict and assist the Palestinian people to finally realize the freedom, rights and justice they have been unjustly denied and achieve Israeli-Palestinian peace, security and coexistence.

In conclusion, we will continue insisting on the need for consensus and decisive action on clear and sustained policies for resolving this protracted conflict. The current situation in the Middle East and North Africa makes it imperative that the United Nations, and the Security Council in particular, demonstrates unity of purpose and act accordingly. We have the collective responsibility to deploy all efforts to see that policies favouring the resumption of negotiations are applied and that Israelis and Palestinians reach tangible results in agreeing to a two-State settlement, with Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security.

Mr. Rycroft (United Kingdom): I would like to join others in thanking the Secretary-General for his briefing. For all the excitement there was last week around the hearings of the candidates for the position of the next Secretary-General, we are pleased to have the current Secretary-General still working very closely with us for many months to come.

Looking back on last week's hearings, it was heartening to hear all nine of the declared candidates committing to achieving a two-State solution, underscoring just how united opinion is on the issue. And yet the violence in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories continues. The risk of a sudden deterioration is all too possible. The fundamental causes of the violence — incitement and the effects of the occupation — remain. The United Kingdom will continue to strongly condemn all acts of violence and terrorism. Both sides must do all they can to calm the situation. That is particularly important during Passover, since the recent past has shown how quickly clashes at Jerusalem's holy sites can escalate and spread.

There is a way out. We all have to work to advance improvements on the ground and re-establish hope that a two-State solution is still achievable. Without that, continued conflict and suffering are inevitable. First and foremost, progress has to come from the parties themselves. We have heard on many occasions that they remain committed to a two-State solution, but too often that commitment has not been matched by action. Israel must reverse its damaging settlement policy and cease demolitions of Palestinian property. The sharp increase in demolitions this year continues to cause terrible suffering. Together with the ongoing expansion of illegal settlements and annexations of land, the physical viability of a two-State solution is being undermined, as the Secretary-General reminded us today. If the

Israeli Government really is committed to a two-State solution, it must reverse its policy.

The Palestinians must also take the necessary steps to reunite the West Bank and Gaza. The continued split between the two territories seriously damages the chances of peace. Reports of large-scale diversions of reconstruction materials to Hamas are worrying, and today's report of a tunnel dug from Gaza into Israel is extremely concerning. We hope that the suspension of the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism will soon be resolved so as to enable the safe entry of much-needed construction material. Both parties must work to improve conditions on the ground and take steps in line with past agreements to bring a two-State solution closer. We will continue to support that process and look forward to contributing to further progress at the meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee in Brussels. The continued development of the Palestinian economy and institutions is vital.

While a return to meaningful negotiations appears difficult at present, the international community, including the Security Council, must do what it can to preserve the viability of a two-State solution and get the parties back to a position where political progress is possible. The United Kingdom, as ever, stands ready to support that effort. To that end, we look forward to the Quartet's report and welcome further details of the French initiative. Carefully coordinated international efforts over the coming months could help to build consensus on the key threats to a two-State solution and encourage action to address them and re-establish a genuine political horizon.

I would now like to turn briefly to Syria. We welcomed the briefing last week by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, as well as his resumption of proximity negotiations with the Syrian Government and the opposition's high negotiations committee in Geneva. We hope they can build a basis for face-to-face negotiations following the framework of the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and resolution 2254 (2015). However, we remain concerned about reports of ongoing violations of the cessation of hostilities. Regime offensives seem intent on encircling Aleppo. Their obstruction of humanitarian aid, especially to Darayya and other areas of rural Damascus, is worsening the suffering, and the failure to agree on mechanisms for the release of arbitrarily detained people is only prolonging horror for a great many individuals, as some of us heard at a powerful event last Thursday. When the Council adopted resolution 2268 (2016), we demanded that the parties fulfil their commitment to the cessation of hostilities, including by accelerating humanitarian delivery and taking confidence-building measures. Such steps were meant to advance a political process. The failure to deliver on those points only undermines that process and erodes the confidence of the Syrian people.

I would like to conclude by calling on those with influence on the parties, and especially on the Syrian Government. We have to leave the regime in no doubt that it must live up to its commitments, show restraint and engage honestly with the political process. Until we see progress on those points, it is right that the Council should receive regular updates from the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy in a public forum. Those who challenge or obstruct peace must be heard by all. There should be no place for them to hide.

Mr. Yoshikawa (Japan): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's important meeting.

Before addressing today's topic, on behalf of the people and the Government of Japan, I would like to express my sincere gratitude for the messages from the Secretary-General and the leaders of many Member States, including a number of my colleagues here in the Council, expressing their sympathy for and solidarity with the people of Japan in the wake of the major earthquakes that struck the Kumamoto region in western Japan. They have taken the lives of more than 40 people and injured more than 1,000, while more than 1,000 are now living anxiously in evacuation centres. Our Self-Defence Forces, police, fire deparments and medical units are working around the clock. We are grateful for the offers of assistance made by many countries and organizations. On 16 April, a major earthquake also struck Ecuador. On behalf of the people and the Government of Japan, I would like to express our solidarity with the people of Ecuador.

In order to save time, I will limit my statement to its salient points and circulate the full text later.

The region of Middle East and North Africa is facing outbreaks of conflict, social unrest and violent extremism. Since January, when Japan became a member of the Security Council, I have listened to many reports on tragic humanitarian situations. We must address the best way for us to contribute concretely to the maintenance of international peace and security in the Middle East and North Africa. In Syria, Yemen

and Libya, we have recently seen glimmers of light and hope for the possibility of bringing a permanent end to the conflicts in each of those countries.

In Syria, the cessation of hostilities that began in late February has created the conditions necessary for facilitating immediate humanitarian access to besieged and hard-to-reach areas, an improvement conducive to the political process. The new round of intra-Syrian talks has just begun in Geneva. We greatly appreciate the tireless efforts of Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, and his team. Japan has been giving aid to Syria for providing food, improving living conditions and implementing vocational training. In that regard, I am pleased to announce that Japan has decided to provide additional assistance amounting to $11 million as grant aid for rehabilitating three existing electricity facilities in Syria through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Notes to that effect were exchanged last Friday here in New York between Ms. Sima Bahous, UNDP's Assistant Administrator, and myself. Electric generators provided by Japan to Syria during the 1980s and 1990s through our development fund continue to furnish more than 56 per cent of the entire electricity supply in Syria. I believe that project will help to strengthen the resilience of Syrian society and thereby create conditions enabling the Syrian people to feel like staying in their country.

Turning to Yemen, Japan welcomes the nation-wide cessation of hostilities in place since 10 April. We have, however, received the disappointing news that the scheduled peace talks in Kuwait, facilitated by Special Envoy Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, have not yet begun. We urge all the Yemeni parties to engage in the peace talks as soon as possible.

As Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 2140 (2014), I have always stressed that sanctions are meant to support a political solution. The resumption of direct talks is therefore a long-awaited step forward. Since September 2014, Japan has extended $85 million in grant assistance to Yemen. One of the projects includes assistance to the constitution-drafting process. I believe that, once an agreement is reached through the Yemen peace talks, the spending assistance programme will continue, and the parties will be able to arrive at an early formulation of the constitution.

Despite some encouraging signs in the region of the Middle East and North Africa, almost no positive change has occurred in the Middle East peace process since the previous open debate in January (see S/PV.7610). As peace talks have stalled, desperation and violence have spread. As Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon recalled today, settlement activities, which are illegal under international law, are in direct contradiction with the goal of a two-State solution. We reiterate that no act justifies violence, and we call on leaders to denounce violence without exception. Japan will continue to provide economic assistance to Palestine in the firm belief that a sustainable economy underpins the viability of a two-State solution. We also stand ready to participate in initiatives that can lead to peace between Israel and Palestine, including the one put forth by the Government of France.

I will end my statement by paying tribute to the tireless efforts on the part of Special Envoys and Representatives of the Secretary-General stationed in the region of Middle East and North Africa, and by expressing my hope that, with the strong political will of the international community, we will see more positive developments in that region during the next debate on this agenda item, slated for July, when Japan will have the honour to preside over the Council.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Security Council is meeting today to discuss and hear the diverse positions and opinions on the Palestinian question. I can assure the Council that what we will hear and say will not differ very much from what we have heard and reiterated over the past 10 years.

The indivisible rights of the Palestinian people have been recognized and documented in the Organization, and most notably within its two principal bodies, the General Assembly and the Security Council, as well as in the international conventions that have been deposited with the United Nations. The recognition of those rights by the international community was not intended to remain theoretical or to mitigate the suffering of the Palestinian people simply by expressions of our condemnation of the occupation and its practices. Rather, the goal was, and remains, to take the necessary measures to end the occupation in all of its forms, thereby ensuring international peace and security. That would be in the service humankind's conscience, but we seem to have forgotten the Palestinians and their right to establish an independent State, based on the 4 June 1967 borders and with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

The increase in occupation activities within the Palestinian territories — whether through colonization, the appropriation of land, the demolition of homes or the forced exodus across the Green Line, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif, is simply the natural consequence of the international community's shortcomings with regard to implementing and defending the right of the Palestinian people to the two-State solution. Allow me to share with everyone very briefly the legal foundations established by the international community and the Security Council for settling the issue in the Middle East.

There are legal bases and resolutions whose implementation we are still waiting for. Some believe that they have been successful in diverting the attention of Arab countries and the international community away from those resolutions. As an example, I will read out paragraphs 5, 6 and 7, respectively, of resolution 465 (1980), which was adopted unanimously and states that the Security Council,

(*spoke in English*)

> "Determines that all measures taken by Israel to change the physical character, demographic composition, institutional structure or status of the Palestinian and other Arab territories occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem, or any part thereof, have no legal validity and that Israel's policy and practices of settling parts of its population and new immigrants in those territories constitute a flagrant violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War and also constitute a serious obstruction to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East;
>
> "Strongly deplores the continuation and persistence of Israel in pursuing those policies and practices and calls upon the Government and people of Israel to rescind those measures, to dismantle the existing settlements and in particular to cease, on an urgent basis, the establishment, construction and planning of settlements in the Arab territories occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem;
>
> "Calls upon all States not to provide Israel with any assistance to be used specifically in connexion with settlements in the occupied territories".

(*spoke in Arabic*)

What I have just read out is not an illustration of the position of Egypt alone, or that of the Arab States alone. It is a position that enjoys international status commensurate with the Charter of the United Nations. It is the view of the international community as reiterated by the Security Council in many of its resolutions, albeit one that still needs to be fully implemented. The resolution is very clear with regard to the legality of the occupation, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif. The Security Council has called upon Israel to dismantle the settlements and has called upon States not to provide aid to Israel in connection with those actions. That reiterated position is in clear support of the Palestinian people regarding their right to protection under the articles of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. Resolution 465 (1980), among others — especially resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) — applies to all occupied Arab territories, including the Syrian Golan. Some think that they can exploit the Syrian crisis to divert the attention of the international community away from the right of the Syrian people to recover their territory. Egypt reiterates that Israel is obligated under those resolutions to withdraw from the occupied Syrian territories in the Golan.

Despite those clear rights and the fact that Israel was supposed to initiate reforms and alter the situation, and despite the injustice that the Palestinian people have been suffering and the continued occupation of Arab territories, including the Golan, the Arab States decided to make a goodwill gesture by proposing the historic initiative of 2002, the Arab Peace Initiative. It affirmed Israel's right to exist in complete security in the region and the right of Israel's people to normalize relations with the people of neighbouring States after ending the occupation. We have therefore been surprised by the attitude and indifference of the Israeli Government with regard to the Initiative over the past years. I ask the following question: Does the Government of Israel prefer to continue the occupation and defy international law, to the detriment of this historic opportunity, which is still available and would allow for the normalization of relations with other countries of the region and thereby allow its people to live in lasting peace and security?

We are not asking anyone to share in expressions of sympathy or condemnation, nor are we searching for a temporary painkiller, the effect of which only weakens over time and cures nothing. The pain of the Palestinian

people is becoming increasingly acute. We are asking the Security Council to undertake a genuine review in complete transparency and implement the two-State solution before it is too late. That can be done during this sensitive period by establishing a comparison between the situation that we were supposed to have achieved, had the Security Council resolutions and the Oslo Accords been implemented, and the current situation. We simply wish that the Security Council would respect its obligations with regard to preserving international peace and security and put an end to the Israeli occupation in conformity with international law, which is of timeless nature. We ask members of the Security Council to review their positions. We also ask Israel to review its position and to ensure that it upholds international humanitarian law and international human rights law. The protections offered by such laws must be provided to all individuals without distinction.

Allow me to conclude by referring to what the representative of Israel said in the Council today when he stated that Jordan and Egypt had laid down their arms to wager on peace instead. I would like to share with the Council what the actual context was, namely, that that peace, as chosen by Israel, was not a peace in terms of our laying down our arms; that we did not do. It was a forced peace aimed at restoring stability in the region, but we have still not officially resolved the issue that led to the conflict in the first place, that is, the occupation by Israel of our Arab territories to this day.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): Uruguay deplores and condemns the terrorist attack carried out just a few minutes ago that targeted a bus in Jerusalem. Uruguay deplores and condemns each and every terrorist attack. Last week, we said that terrorism could truly be labelled as an act of cowardice; that is the only appropriate name for it.

At the outset, I would like to begin by thanking the Secretary-General in particular for his presence and for his briefing to the Security Council, in which he referred to various elements and positions that Uruguay shares. The impasse in the peace process between Israel and Palestine, the events of recent months in Syria, the situation in Yemen, the continuing impact of the activities of terrorist groups in the region and, in particular, the death and suffering of thousands of innocent victims are but some of the challenges that the Middle East continues to face.

On the issue of the Middle East peace process, Uruguay would like to reaffirm its full support for the right of Israel and Palestine to live at peace within secure and recognized borders in a spirit of renewed cooperation, free from any threats or acts that might undermine peace, particularly including acts of terrorism. Uruguay reiterates its full support for a two-State solution, firmly convinced that it is the only option that would allow the coexistence of Israel and Palestine on a peaceful footing.

We stress the need for the international community to increase its efforts to encourage the parties to return to the negotiating table with a view to achieving a peaceful, just, negotiated and lasting solution — one that is in line with international law and takes due account of the interests and needs of all the parties to the conflict. We call upon them to refrain from adopting unilateral decisions, which simply hinder dialogue. In that respect, we believe that, as a result, there can be no continuation of the settlement policy, the settlements being illegal in the West Bank.

Uruguay also robustly condemns the stabbings and other brutal attacks targeting Israeli citizens, as well as the incitement to, and glorification of, those abhorrent acts. We would like to reiterate the importance of international cooperation. Such cooperation is essential for contributing to the economic and social development of the Palestinian people. The strengthening, and the establishment where necessary, of national institutions and basic infrastructure are also essential in order to ensure the viability of the Palestinian State, a State that has pursued the path towards confirmation as a full-fledged sovereign State.

Uruguay would like to highlight the deep bonds of friendship that unite us with both the State of Israel and the Palestinian State. We would like to take this opportunity to reiterate the willingness of Uruguay to contribute to and support any initiative that could lead to a successful conclusion of the peace process. We have taken note of the statement delivered by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of New Zealand, Mr. Murray McCully, and we would like to convey our willingness to work with him.

With regard to the situation in Syria, we believe that the efforts undertaken to find a political solution to the conflict are crucial. In that context, we would like to reiterate our full support for the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General to Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura,

and his entire team. They have engaged in important work and made significant progress in bringing about face-to-face talks between the two parties, thereby making progress in finding a political solution to the conflict, as provided for in resolution 2254 (2015).

The cessation of hostilities in Syria, in place since 27 February, has allowed us an opportunity to substantially reduce violence, improve humanitarian access and foster a better climate for the negotiations in Geneva. Despite the fragility of the current situation and the fact that there have been some setbacks in recent days, we believe that this is the best course of action that might finally bring an end to the long and bloody war in that country. Faced with the dramatic humanitarian situation in Syria, Uruguay would like to underscore the need to continue efforts to ensure that humanitarian assistance makes its way to those who most need it. We would like to reiterate our appeal to the Syrian Government to grant, without further delay, the necessary permits in order to ensure that humanitarian agencies can continue their shipments and can continue with their vital work.

Uruguay would like to stress the illegality, inacceptability and immorality of using hunger as a tactic of war. Such practices constitute war crimes, and all who commit such crimes should be held accountable. We also denounce all attacks on humanitarian and medical personnel and the seizing of medical provisions from humanitarian convoys. Such actions must come to an end. They are in no way commensurate with the standards of international humanitarian law. My country, together with other members of the Security Council, is working on a draft resolution to address the situation in Syria that we hope will soon be accepted.

With regard to Yemen, Uruguay commends the efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General to Yemen, Mr. Ismail Ould Cheikh Abmed, and welcomes the recent agreement on the cessation of hostilities in the country. Uruguay has confidence in the negotiations, which were supposed to begin today in order to achieve an exit point for the conflict. Similarly, we would like to emphasize the vulnerability of the Yemeni population at this time. It is alarming that approximately 80 per cent of the population needs some form of humanitarian assistance, which means that it is urgent that we adopt measures to put an end to the suffering of the civilian population.

Finally, turning to the situation in Libya, Uruguay warmly welcomed the news of the arrival in Tripoli of the members of the Presidential Council of the Government of National Accord. We hope that that event will constitute a turning point ushering in a new phase in the history of Libya, a phase in which both the new Government and the international community will focus and pool their efforts on the unity, stability, security and development of the country.

I would like to reiterate Uruguay's conviction that, through diplomacy, dialogue and strict adherence to international law, we can lay the foundations that will allow us to deliver lasting peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Ciss (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): My delegation welcomes the Chinese presidency's initiative to convene this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. The Secretary-General reported on the political and security situation in the region in his briefing, and I would like to thank him for that. The situation justifies the Security Council's regular discussion of it.

At the outset, may I, on behalf of my Government and the people of Senegal, express my condolences and solidarity with the people of Japan and Ecuador, hard hit during the recent earthquakes.

With regard to terrorism, I would like to recall that Senegal condemns all violence, regardless of where it comes from.

Our meeting this morning comes once again at a time characterized by continued settlement activity, an exacerbation of violence and an absence of a political horizon in the occupied territories of Palestine. The stalemate in the political process is undoubtedly the basis for the spike in violence on both sides, with a large number of casualties, especially on the Palestinian side. Since October 2015, the escalating violence has led to the death of over 200 Palestinians, including 48 children, and 30 Israelis, not to mention the thousands of wounded. It bears repeating that the systematic and disproportionate use of force is not a solution to the crisis, especially in the absence of a political horizon.

We must deplore the incitement to violence and hatred that certain Palestinian factions engage in. We must also condemn the unacceptable acts of terrorism committed by Israeli settlers in the West Bank, including in Jerusalem. Those acts are likely to aggravate the already deep divisions between the two peoples and

to undermine the prospects for reconciliation and sustainable peace.

The punitive policies carried out by the occupying Power in the Palestinian territories are also a source of concern. Since the beginning of this year, hundreds of Palestinian homes and structures, some built with the help of international partners, have been destroyed, and the number of demolitions this year far exceeds that of 2015.

Similarly, the unacceptable policy involving the geographical, demographic and cultural modification of Jerusalem risks turning the political crisis into a religious conflict with serious consequences for the whole region and beyond. In addition to constituting violations of international law, the increasing settlement activities challenge the two-State solution, to which the Israeli State has nonetheless reiterated its commitment.

One cannot ignore the worrisome situation of the Palestinian economy, in particular in Gaza. In addition to being an unacceptable humanitarian disaster, the blockade against the Gaza Strip is a potential threat to Israel's security, in that it increases the already real risk of having the Palestinian cause coopted or used by other actors, such as the Islamic State, with all the negative consequences that that may bring about. In that respect, we call upon the Israeli Government to take the necessary measures, particularly in the economic field, to alleviate the suffering of the affected populations.

Palestine has a school enrolment rate of approximately 99 per cent, one of the highest rates in the world, and gender balance is deeply rooted in the education system, thanks to the commendable efforts of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). However, with an unemployment rate of over 40 per cent among graduates, it is easy to understand the sense of desperation that drives people, especially young people. In addition, the impact of the Syrian crisis on Palestinian refugees, especially children, is worrying. It should be recalled that 42 per cent of the 118 schools run by UNRWA in Syria, which were attended by 67,300 students, have been forced to close. In total, no fewer than 460,000 Palestinians have directly suffered the consequences of the war in Syria.

In awaiting the recent efforts of the Quartet, including the forthcoming issuance of the report on the status quo, based on a decision taken at the high-level meeting in Munich on 12 February with a view to overcoming the current impasse, my country remains willing to consider any initiative that would lead to a resumption of the negotiations, including that of France to organize an international conference on the Palestinian issue.

For its part, Senegal calls for the resumption of negotiations between Israel and Palestine on the basis of clear elements, with a specific time frame for reaching a final solution based on international law and the relevant resolutions. The time has come for a Palestinian State to be established within secure and internationally recognized borders, in accordance with the United Nations partition plan of 1948. A solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the basis of two States, with East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine, would clearly lead to better management of the security and socioeconomic challenges in the Middle East. In the meantime, the Council should plan for precautionary measures to enforce the status quo at the holy sites in Jerusalem, without forgetting the solution of the international protectorate for the Palestinian people. The practical elements identified by the Secretariat, based on historic precedent, at the request of the State of Palestine, seem absolutely worthwhile, pending a lasting solution to the crisis, which we eagerly await.

In concluding, I must renew our appeal to the Palestinian political actors to join the Cairo agreement, committing in good faith to the Doha negotiations so as to work towards the formation a Government of national unity, which would facilitate the revival of a political process with Israel.

The conference on the issue of Jerusalem, which is to be convened on 3 and 4 May in Dakar on the initiative of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People in cooperation with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, will provide an opportunity, I hope, to contribute to the development of practical solutions to the issues facing that city, which is a symbol of the three monotheistic religions. I take this opportunity to renew our invitation to all States Members of the Organization to actively participate in the meeting.

With regard to the situation in Syria, my delegation appeals to the parties to the conflict to continue, with the support of influential stakeholders, including countries in the region and the International Syria Support Group, to uphold the cessation of hostilities, pursuant to resolution 2268 (2016), which was itself the

result of the joint efforts of the task force on the truce in Syria, which we commend.

In that regard, I wish to reiterate to Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States for Syria, our full support for his efforts to restore lasting peace in Syria, where the conflict has already led to the death of more than 260,000 people and generated 4.6 million refugees and 13.5 million displaced persons.

Finally, with regard to Yemen, we reaffirm Senegal's support for the initiatives of the Special Adviser on Yemen aimed at promoting a credible political process and lasting peace in the country. We appeal to the parties to uphold the ceasefire in order to facilitate the discussions in Kuwait.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): I wish to thank the Chinese presidency for convening this open debate. We fully agree with the importance of a regular review of the situation in the Middle East by the Security Council.

I also would like to express our solidarity with Ecuador and Japan, which suffered major earthquakes over the past two days.

Ukraine consistently supports the Middle East peace process and the principle of a two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine coexisting in peace and security. In that regard, we are deeply concerned about the latest wave of attacks and widespread violence that has been seen since September 2015 and has resulted in numerous casualties. The rising death toll among civilians cannot, and should not, be tolerated; it serves as irrefutable proof that the status quo is just not sustainable. Another terrible reminder of that is the recent attack against the Israeli bus in Jerusalem, which we condemn in the strongest terms. It is obvious that absolutely no terrorist act can be justified. Yet we strongly believe that all sides must demonstrate genuine restraint and to refrain from the disproportionate use of force, which can only stir up violence and lead to increased casualties. All of that plays into the hands of extremists, who are trying to undermine the fragile prospects for peace.

We are convinced that the establishment of a stable, peaceful and democratic Palestinian State is in Israel's long-term security interests. However, the ongoing process of settlement expansion and the legalization of outposts could undermine the efforts of the international community to achieve tangible progress in the peace process. On the other hand, we fully understand the aspirations of the people of Israel to live in peace within secure borders. Therefore, the inability of the Palestinian authorities to prevent the acts of violence regularly perpetrated against Israeli citizens is of serious concern.

Let me stress our conviction that palpable progress in the peace process can be achieved only through mutual compromises and concessions reached at the negotiation table. We firmly believe that only a negotiated settlement leading to an Israeli and a Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security is realistic. For the Israelis, it would mean a life free from violence and the daily fear of terror, and for the Palestinians, finally, a chance to live freely in a State of their own.

Everybody seems to share a common vision that there is no alternative to the peace process. Ukraine, which supports the efforts of the Quartet and regional countries aimed at achieving a settlement of the conflict, favours the early resumption of direct Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. We believe that direct talks between the parties are the best way to achieve a peaceful solution, as no unilateral steps will solve the key problems facing the peace process.

At the same time, it is quite obvious that it is not enough just to demand action from the Israeli and the Palestinian sides. Ultimate success will depend on a genuine commitment by all interested parties. Diplomatic efforts must be redoubled so as to contain and de-escalate the latest wave of violence and unlock Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

In this light, we believe that the French initiative to convene an international conference aimed at recreating the momentum for the resumption of talks deserves serious consideration. I can also assure the Council that Ukraine remains steadfast in its support for any effort to restore the hope that a two-State solution can be achieved through negotiations.

Speaking of wider Middle East regional security, we cannot but underscore the importance of the ongoing efforts to resolve the conflicts in Syria and Yemen. The Syrian crisis is probably the gravest regional crisis and one of the biggest security challenges the world has faced recently. We are convinced that the final point of destination of the Syrian political process is the establishment of a credible, inclusive, non-sectarian

governance transition body, followed by a new constitution and elections.

At present, we are at a critical juncture in the efforts to reach a long-overdue settlement in Syria. The ongoing second round of intra-Syrian talks in Geneva is cause for hope, but at the same time it underscores the challenges that lay ahead.

Where are we after the two rounds of talks? Unfortunately, there have been no profound changes in the situation. We see the Syrian regime continuing its obstructive approach to each of the three pillars of the settlement of the current Syrian crisis: the cessation of hostilities, a political transition and humanitarian access.

On Yemen, we are cautiously optimistic and encouraged by the fact that the United Nations-brokered ceasefire that started on 10 April is holding, despite minor violations. This certainly creates a conducive environment for the talks in Kuwait, which were to start today but were postponed, as we have just learned with regret.

The lack of meaningful dialogue during this round of talks could have disastrous results. The only ones to benefit from this would be terrorist groups, which are increasingly active in Yemen. Therefore we believe that it is also important that this opportunity be taken to intensify efforts to drive back Da'esh and Al-Qaida in Yemen.

The rapidly evolving threat of violent extremism cannot be contained within the boundaries of any region. It benefits from existing conflicts and continues to destabilize countries across the Middle East. We must address the root causes that led to this challenge in the first place. Therefore, to prevent the further spread of violent extremism, we need to work harder to resolve the unprecedented humanitarian crisis unfolding in this part of the world. The recent refugee crisis in Europe is yet another reminder of the fact that we cannot turn a blind eye to the catastrophic humanitarian situation in Syria, Libya, Iraq and Yemen.

I hope that the tireless efforts of the wider international community and the Council will yield results and that the vicious circle of violence in the Middle East will finally be broken.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of China.

At the outset, I should like to express our condolences and sympathy to the Governments and the peoples of Japan and Ecuador. We are certain that they will overcome their difficulties and rebuild their countries as soon as possible.

I thank the Secretary-General for his briefing, and we appreciate the efforts by the Secretariat and the Secretary-General himself for advancing the peace process in the Middle East.

The question of Palestine is the core of the Middle East question and underpins peace in the Middle East. It is the shared responsibility of the international community to safeguard the legitimate interests of the Palestinian people. At present, the situation between Palestine and Israel is grim. Violent conflicts are on the rise, the peace talks have come to an impasse, the security situation has deteriorated, and humanitarian disasters have intensified.

The conflict between Palestine and Israel poses the danger of continuous escalation, with the spillover effect also on the rise. A comprehensive and fair solution to the Palestinian question is in the interests of all sides. The international community should take swift action and focus its efforts on the following aspects.

First, we must stay the right course: establishing an independent State of Palestine and peaceful coexistence between Palestine and Israel. Establishing a Palestinian State with full sovereignty, based on the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital, is the inalienable right of the Palestinian people as well as the key to resolving the question of Palestine. Intra-Palestine reconciliation could facilitate the establishment of the State of Palestine.

Secondly, peace talks, as the only way forward, must continue. If they stall, this could exacerbate differences, incite hatred and drag Palestine and Israel into a vicious circle of escalating violence in which both sides would pay a heavy price. The use of force is never a solution. The earlier the peace talks start, the sooner the people of Palestine and Israel will benefit. It is only by resuming negotiations at an early date that it will be possible to achieve peace and stability between Palestine and Israel and the region. This is in the fundamental interests of both sides.

Thirdly, in promoting the peace process we must abide by the principle of land for peace, the two-State solution, the Arab Peace Initiative and the relevant

United Nations resolutions. These are important outcomes achieved by the international community following difficult negotiations and serve as important guidance for advancing the peace process in the Middle East. On this basis, all sides should stay the course and help to promote a political solution.

Fourthly, both Palestine and Israel should take specific steps to move the peace process forward. Israel must first demonstrate its sincerity by taking practical steps to stop its settlement activities, cease the demolition of Palestinian properties and stop the violence against innocent civilians. It should lift the blockade on Gaza so as to create conditions conducive to the resumption of talks. At the same time, the legitimate security concerns of the States of the region should also be respected.

Fifthly, in order to advance the peace process, the international community should provide vital guarantees. The international community recently intensified its efforts to resolve the Palestinian question, with new ideas and innovative thinking, including creating an international support group, convening an international peace conference on the Palestinian question, and cultivating forces for peace in the Middle East. The international community should strengthen coordination, turn the positive momentum into concrete action and make every effort to achieve realistic and operable results. The Security Council should respond positively to the legitimate demands of the Palestinians and the Arab States and give serious consideration to draft resolutions on providing international protection to the Palestinian people and ending the expansion and construction of settlements. It should take the necessary actions to promote the relaunching of peace talks.

Sixthly, the international community should do its best to improve the humanitarian situation in Palestine and continue to advance its economic reconstruction. China calls upon Israel to cooperate with the international aid efforts by completely lifting the blockade on Gaza. All parties should respond positively to the United Nations aid plan for Palestine and scaled-up assistance to Gaza. They should engage economic cooperation with Palestine so that the humanitarian situation and the climate for survival on the ground will improve and the Palestinian people will be able to see hope.

China has always supported the Palestinian people's struggle for its legitimate national rights and has worked to promote peace and negotiations. In 2013, President Xi Jinping made a four-point proposal for resolving the Palestinian-Israeli issue. During his visit to the Middle East in January 2016, President Xi reiterated that China would firmly support the just cause of the Palestinian people. The Chinese Government's Special Envoy on Middle East affairs has been actively engaged in efforts to promote peace and negotiations. Every year, China provides economic assistance to Palestine through the United Nations or bilaterally for improving the welfare of the Palestinian people.

Last January, China decided to provide RMB50 million of free aid to Palestine. China is ready to join the international community in a continued effort to promote a bona fide solution of the Israeli-Palestinian issue. As a steadfast supporter of, and facilitator for, peace in the Middle East, China has been working actively for a peaceful political settlement of the questions in Syria, Yemen, Libya, among other hotspots, with a view to achieving peace and stability in the Middle East at an early date.

With regard to the Syrian issue, the agreement between the parties on the cessation of hostilities is holding. Progress has been achieved in the field of humanitarian relief and the peace talks in Geneva are on track. The international community should continue to support the Secretary-General's Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura in his good offices and make the following efforts.

First, it should support United Nations relief agencies in their efforts to expand humanitarian relief activities. The countries concerned should strengthen communication and coordination with the Government of Syria to facilitate the process.

Secondly, it should ensure that all the Syrian parties will continue to abide by the agreement on the cessation of hostilities so as to continue to ease the situation.

Thirdly, it should promote progress in the peace talks in Geneva and encourage the parties to follow the principle of moving from the easy to the difficult, starting with the issues where consensus exists in order to produce a timely result and promote confidence-building.

Fourthly, it should step up the international fight against terrorism and join hands in combating the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham, the Al-Nusra Front and other terrorist organizations listed by the Council.

The Chinese Government appointed Ambassador Xie Xiaoyan as its Special Envoy for the Syrian crisis. As always, China will promote the political process for a settlement of the Syrian question.

On the question of Yemen, the nationwide cessation of hostilities by the Yemeni parties and the new round of political dialogue in Kuwait signify a return to the political track of consultation and dialogue on the question. We hope that the Yemeni parties will honour their commitment to abide by the cessation of hostilities agreement and demonstrate political will in the national dialogue by tackling issues such as the military conflict, security arrangements and the restoration of State institutions, on the one hand, and focus on the establishment of an inclusive political system in Yemen and the formulation of a political solution that meets Yemen's reality and accommodates the concerns of all parties, on the other. All parties to the conflict should actively cooperate with the United Nations humanitarian relief efforts and provide safe and unimpeded access to humanitarian relief items in order to ease the humanitarian situation on the ground.

On the question of Libya, recently the Libyan parties made an important headway in implementing the Libyan political agreement. The Presidential Council of the Government of National Accord moved into the capital to start its work, but the country's deep-rooted problems have yet to be completely resolved, while the external environment is highly complex. Efforts should be made to promote synergy between Libya's internal efforts and external political support to further consolidate the current state of affairs. Libya should adhere to a political process that is led by Libyans and open to all parties. They should work hard to defuse conflicts, achieve national reconciliation and adopt measures that are in keeping with the popular will and the national choice. The international community should urge the Libyan parties to join and fully implement the Libyan political agreement, ensure safe and smooth proceedings by the Presidential Council and settle differences through dialogue and consultation.

Countries in the Middle East are all confronted with the formidable challenge of terrorism. The fight against terrorism is closely connected with the settlement of the hotspot issues in the Middle East. Increasing cooperation against terrorism is a joint responsibility of the States of the region and of the international community. All the parties concerned, within the framework of the United Nations, should adopt common measures, resolutely crack down on the spreading of ideologies of violent extremism and terrorism, sever the channels of financing for terrorism and stop foreign terrorist flows in order to create favourable conditions for the political resolution of hotspot issues. With regard to counter-terrorism, there should be no double standards. Neither should terrorism be linked with a specific ethnicity or religion.

China is ready to work with the international community in a joint effort to find a way out of the chaos in the Middle East in order to reduce conflicts and suffering, create more tranquility and human dignity there and so that peace, stability and development may prevail soon.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate their texts in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber. I would like appeal to speakers to deliver their statements at a reasonable speed in order that interpretation may be provided accurately.

I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Isabella Lövin, Minister for International Development and Cooperation of Sweden.

Ms. Lövin (Sweden): I would like to align itself with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union later this afternoon, but I would like to take this opportunity to make a statement in my national capacity.

Let me begin by encouraging the Yemeni parties to engage without delay in the United Nations-facilitated peace talks, which were scheduled to begin today in Kuwait. Those talks will hopefully bring us closer to a political solution in Yemen. Sweden welcomes the cessation of hostilities in place since 10 April, and we urge all parties to respect it. The massive humanitarian needs must be met. Sweden is among the largest humanitarian donors in Yemen, with contributions of over $50 million since the conflict began.

Making the Syria talks in Geneva a success is an enormous challenge, but the world cannot afford to fail. Five years of horrific warfare must be brought to an end. A political transition must be achieved. The

Syrian people deserve to live in peace and democracy. For the talks to succeed, all the parties must fully implement the resolutions of the Security Council. While the cessation of hostilities seems to be broadly holding, I am gravely concerned by the slowing down in humanitarian access. In particular, I am appalled by reports that medicines and medical equipment are being removed from humanitarian convoys, costing innocent lives. That is completely unacceptable.

Sweden supports the work of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, not least by funding Syrian women's participation. Moreover, Sweden is assisting the Syrian people in three ways.

First, we are stepping up resilience funding through our new $200 million Syria Crisis Strategy.

Secondly, we are increasing our humanitarian aid, amounting to over $300 million.

Thirdly, Sweden has received over 120,000 refugees who have fled Syria, one of the highest numbers in Europe.

Sweden recognizes that the neighbouring countries, especially Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, are under immense pressure. That is why our Syria crisis strategy includes support for those countries' actions as well.

Next year will mark 50 years of the occupation of Palestine. All of us are aware of the urgency of the situation on the ground and the absence of a political solution. The two-State solution is fading away before our very eyes. We are seeing continued violence and the rapid continuation of settlement construction. We are seeing unprecedented numbers of demolitions of Palestinian homes and infrastructure.

The settlements are illegal and an obstacle to peace. Settlement activity in East Jerusalem seriously jeopardizes the possibility of Jerusalem serving as the future capital of both States. A fundamental change in the settlement policy is needed, particularly in East Jerusalem and Area C. Such a change would increase economic opportunities, empower Palestinian institutions and enhance stability and security for both Israelis and Palestinians.

Sweden stands firmly against terrorism. All acts of violence against civilians, including the horrific attack on the civilian bus in Jerusalem today, are despicable and must be condemned by all. Yet security measures alone will not end the violence. The underlying causes of the conflict must be addressed. Only then will the violence come to an end. Only then will peace and stability prevail. Only then will the citizens in Israel and Palestine be able to live their lives in dignity.

The situation in Gaza remains critical. Recent rocket attacks from Gaza and the Israeli air strike in retaliation show the urgency of the situation. They are reminders of the risk of further violent escalation. In a couple of years, the lack of potable water will be irreversible. The isolation of Gaza must end therefore, and reconstruction must be fast-tracked.

The European Union and Sweden have called upon all the parties to guarantee unimpeded humanitarian access to Gaza for humanitarian organizations and other international actors, including State representatives, in accordance with international humanitarian law.

In order to save the prospects of a two-State solution and counter the growing hopelessness among youth, the international community must move from words to action. We must help the parties to move forward by creating new dynamics and momentum for a meaningful peace process to end the occupation. Sweden therefore fully supports the French initiative on an international peace conference, as a way for the parties and the world to recommit to the two-State solution. Sweden is encouraged by the increased Quartet activity,and looks forward to the publication of the announced Quartet report.

The Security Council has a central role to play and must shoulder its responsibility to uphold its resolutions and the Charter of the United Nations. If we, the international community, are serious about our commitment to the two-State solution, we have important work to do in the months ahead.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): There are still a number of speakers remaining on my list for this meeting. Given the lateness of the hour, I intend, with the concurrence of the members of the Council, to suspend the meeting until 3 p.m.

The meeting was suspended at 1.25 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.7673 (Resumption 1)

Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

7673rd meeting
Monday, 18 April 2016, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Wu Haitao	(China)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Casimiro
	Egypt	Mr. Moussa
	France	Mr. Gorjestani
	Japan	Mr. Takeda
	Malaysia	Mr. Abdul Razak
	New Zealand	Mr. Walbridge
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Senegal	Mr. Diallo
	Spain	Ms. Del Río Novo
	Ukraine	Mr. Bilan
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Maguire
	United States of America	Mr. Wagner
	Uruguay	Mr. Bermúdez
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Arcia Vivas

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting resumed at 3.10 p.m.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Security Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate their texts in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber. I would appeal to speakers to deliver their statements at a reasonable speed so that interpretation may be provided accurately.

I now give the floor to the representative of Brazil.

Mr. De Aguiar Patriota (Brazil): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important open debate today. I also wish to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing and to acknowledge the statements made by the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine.

After five years of protracted hostilities and human suffering, it is heartening to acknowledge that the cessation of hostilities in Syria is creating the conditions for a gradual advance towards stabilization and peace. There has been an overall decrease in casualties since February. Important cities such as Palmyra are no longer controlled by the self-proclaimed Islamic State. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reports a positive trend with respect to humanitarian access. Besieged or isolated areas are being reached for the first time in years.

Nevertheless, growing violations reported by both sides to the conflict in recent weeks may threaten the significant progress that has been made. We call on the parties to fully respect the cessation of hostilities. We should spare no effort in working towards a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political transition aimed at establishing credible, inclusive and non-sectarian governance, drafting a new constitution and ending the war, as established by resolution 2254 (2015).

In that regard, we welcome the new round of intra-Syrian negotiations launched last week in Geneva under the auspices of the United Nations and with the assistance of the International Syria Support Group. Brazil reaffirms its steadfast support for the efforts of Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura and those of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, led by Mr. Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro.

But we are also concerned about the negative humanitarian impact of unilateral sanctions on Syria. As a study commissioned by a group of experts recently confirmed, unilateral economic and trade measures often create insurmountable practical barriers to the work of humanitarian organizations attempting to deliver food, medicine, fuel and other essential items to civilians affected by the conflict. The sanctions also hinder the establishment of conditions conducive to refugees' safe and voluntary return to Syria, thereby exacerbating the massive displacement crisis currently affecting many Middle Eastern and European societies. Lastly, they obstruct key initiatives aimed at restoring and rebuilding Syria's economy and infrastructure.

It is worth recalling that the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, set up by the Human Rights Council, has spoken out against such sanctions. Brazil has long held that unilateral sanctions are counterproductive and incompatible with international law. The Security Council is the only body with a clear legal mandate to impose coercive economic measures, and I would like to recall here that, in its resolution 70/185, the General Assembly states clearly that unilateral coercive economic measures constitute a flagrant violation of the Charter of the United Nations and contravene the basic principles of the multilateral trading system.

The absence of any positive signs of concrete developments on the question of Palestine is alarming. The peace process remains stalled, acts of violence continue to occur and we are witnessing disrespect for the principle of due process of law, leading to more violence. Illegal settlements, demolitions and land expropriations proliferate in the West Bank, and the humanitarian situation remains dire, particularly in Gaza. If left unchanged, this intolerable status quo will continue to destabilize the Middle East and erode the credibility of the Security Council. Brazil expects the Council to live up to its responsibilities by acting decisively to establish parameters for the end of the occupation. The only viable solution remains a Palestinian State that is fully sovereign, economically sustainable and territorially contiguous, with borders based on the internationally recognized 1967 lines, living in peace and security with Israel. In that regard, we are following with interest the initiative of holding an international conference aimed at garnering broad support for the peace process, as proposed by France. Reports of a draft resolution that would require Israel

to freeze the construction of settlements and set a time frame for arriving at a two-State solution are also encouraging.

Concerning Yemen, the cessation of hostilities initiated last week and the resumption of peace negotiations in Kuwait under the auspices of Mr. Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, are a much-needed step towards ending a conflict that has left innocent civilians unprotected and exposed them to many extreme forms of strife. As reported by international human-rights organizations, air strikes have repeatedly hit protected areas such as hospitals, as well as populated regions. A particularly grave incident was the bombing of a market in Mastaba, which killed at least 97 civilians, including 25 children. We call on all parties to fulfil their obligation to respect international humanitarian and human-rights law, including the fundamental rules of distinction, proportionality and precaution. Brazil continues to uphold the imperative of a sustainable and inclusive political solution to the Yemeni crisis achieved through non-military means.

While Libya remains deeply unstable, recent developments suggest that a measure of progress has been made towards solving the country's significant political and security challenges. We welcome the arrival in Tripoli of the Presidency Council of the Government of National Accord, endorsed by resolution 2259 (2015), as well as reports that it has already consolidated authority over key ministries and State institutions. Brazil reiterates its support for Special Representative Martin Kobler and urges all the parties to work to restore peace and national unity in Libya.

As a general thought, and in line with the overall template that underpins the three reports submitted in 2015 on peace operations (S/2015/682), sustaining peace (S/2015/560) and on women and peace and security (S/2015/716), the United Nations, and the Security Council in particular, should privilege and revitalize preventive measures and diplomatic efforts to solve disputes through peaceful means, especially those in the Middle East.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations.

Mr. Vale de Almeida: I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU).

The ongoing crisis in Syria, including the connected spread of Da'esh, poses an existential threat to the Syrian people. The consequences are also particularly felt by its neighbours and the wider region, and in Europe itself as well. If we want to tackle this threat, we must first intensify our joint efforts to put an end to the war in Syria by arriving at a political solution within the framework of the 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and resolution 2254 (2015). Secondly, we must all join forces against Da'esh in an even more effective way.

The European Union is an active member of the International Syria Support Group and its two task forces, on humanitarian access and a cessation of hostilities, and fully supports the efforts of Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General. There is no alternative to the intra-Syrian talks being conducted under the aegis of the United Nations if we are to reach the goal of a political settlement. We expect all Syrian parties and their backers to engage in the process. In particular, we encourage the Syrian regime to engage in good faith and to address the substantive aspects of a political transition.

In that context, the EU emphasizes the importance of four key elements agreed on by the International Syria Support Group and endorsed by Security Council resolutions. First is the consolidation and expansion of the cessation of hostilities. It is incumbent upon all parties to respect the agreement of 27 February. Secondly, there is the consolidation and expansion of humanitarian access, especially to besieged and still hard-to-reach areas. The Al-Assad regime has a particular responsibility in that regard, since a clear majority of the besieged areas are under its control. Thirdly, there is the release of arbitrarily detained persons, particularly women and children. Fourthly and, I would say, extremely important, is embarking upon a political transition, without delay and with the intention of reaching a lasting solution.

As we have stressed in the past, the Middle East peace process remains vital not only for those directly affected by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but also for the stability of the wider region and thereby also for the European Union. Despite current challenges on the ground, the EU remains united in its commitment to achieving a two-State solution based on the parameters set out in the Council's conclusions of July 2014. We reiterate that there is no alternative to a negotiated two-State solution, which remains the only realistic way of

ending the conflict to the main benefit of both Israelis and Palestinians. Regrettably, those populations are now adversely affected by the recent violence, which is taking a terrible human toll and further undermining trust on both sides.

The EU has taken a clear stance and condemned acts of terror and violence against innocent civilians from all sides. In January, our Foreign Affairs Council also urged all sides to refrain from actions that could fuel further tension by way of incitement and provocation, while adhering to the principles of necessity and proportionality in the use of force. We also recognize the special significance of holy sites and urge all to uphold the status quo for the Temple Mount, Al-Haram Al-Sharif. However, we remain convinced that security and short-term measures alone are no substitute for sustainable political solutions. Only significant policy shifts on the ground and the re-establishment of a political horizon can end the violence, rebuild trust and pave the way for meaningful negotiations on the outstanding issues. In that context, it is vital to ensure that all international initiatives are directed towards that goal.

The EU will play a leading part, not least through the its Special Representative for the Middle East peace process and the Quartet, which is currently drafting a report on the dangers of the current trajectory with significant recommendations on the best way to advance a two-State solution. In that context, the European Union also welcomes other initiatives in the international arena, such as the international peace conference proposed by France, as one part of a broader and coordinated effort to preserve and strengthen the two-State solution.

The role of regional partners remains essential. The Arab Peace Initiative could serve as an important pillar of any future comprehensive peace agreement, while it also provides an opportunity for building a regional security framework. The Security Council has an obvious and crucial role in that context. We take this opportunity to offer our full support to the Secretary-General's Special Coordinator for the Middle East Process, Mr. Mladenov. The EU believes that an integrated approach among international stakeholders can help revive the Middle East peace process. We look forward to working closely with partners in the months ahead towards that common goal. The power to change the situation is obviously primarily in the hands of local leaders and societies. The support and active participation of both sides of the conflict remain a crucial prerequisite for the success of any peace initiative.

Both sides will need to demonstrate through policies and actions that they are genuinely committed to the two-State solution. They must end all actions that undermine the viability of the two-State solution. The EU is highly concerned by the ongoing erosion of the viability of a two State-solution. In that context, we reiterate that settlements are illegal under international law, constitute an obstacle to peace and threaten to make a two-State solution impossible. As it has consistently reaffirmed in its Council conclusions, and most recently in January 2016, the EU is strongly opposed to Israel's settlement policy and to actions taken in that context, such as the recent increase in demolitions, including those of EU and EU-member States' funded projects in Area C, the declaration of private land as State land, the legalization of unauthorized outposts and confiscations, as well as the forced transfers of people. Settlement activity in East Jerusalem seriously jeopardizes the possibility of Jerusalem serving as the future capital of both States.

By the same token, jointly addressing the needs of the Palestinian population should be a top priority for Palestinian political leaders. We therefore urge Palestinian factions to bring ongoing reconciliation efforts to a rapid and successful conclusion, on the basis of democracy and the principles of the Palestinian Liberation Organization. Palestinian unity and accountable and democratic Palestinian institutions will be crucial in establishing a viable Palestinian State. We welcome the meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians, the main mechanism for aid management and donor coordination, being held in Brussels today and tomorrow in the presence of the two parties. Its role is to underpin political efforts to achieve a two-State solution by supporting the development of institutions in preparation for Palestinian statehood.

There must also be accelerated efforts to address the dire situation in Gaza. While the EU has delivered on all its pledges made at the Cairo Conference in 2014, we urge all others to follow suit. Increased access to Gaza through legal crossings would also contribute to an improved situation in accordance with resolution 1860 (2009).

Let me end by noting that, in our view, the forthcoming Quartet report should be the basis to set out in more detail the concrete steps that both sides must take to recreate the political horizon for a two-State solution with the full support of the international community.

Together, we need to find ways to prevent further disasters in the Middle East mainly for humanitarian reasons, but also because despair can breed radicalization and further violence. Together with international partners, and hopefully with crucial input by the core parties to the conflict, the European Union will continue its concerted efforts to prevent the further escalation of violence and defend the viability of the two-State solution.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Lebanon.

Mr. Salam (Lebanon): Since the beginning of 2016, according to official United Nations statistics — let me underline that those are official United Nations statistics, not drawn from any Palestinian or Arab source — the Israeli authorities have demolished 539 so-called structures in Area C of the occupied Palestinian territory, as compared to a total of 453 for all of 2015. Similarly, since the beginning of this year, 805 Palestinians have been displaced as a result of the demolition of their homes, as compared to a total of 580 for all of 2015. In fact, statistics from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs show that from 50 demolitions per month in the period from 2012 to 2015, the average has risen to 165 per month since January 2016, with 235 demolitions in February alone. To put those figures into context, let me also recall that, since September 2000, Israel has been responsible for the killing of more than 9,300 Palestinian civilians, including 2,100 children, and for the injury of more than 87,000 persons. Moreover, since 1967, Israel has been responsible for the demolition of 28,000 Palestinian homes.

Those facts are a clear reminder that Israel, the occupying Power, has not only failed to meet its primary responsibility under the Fourth Geneva Convention to protect Palestinian civilians, but, on the contrary, has been pursuing a deliberate and continuous policy of strangulation against Palestinian civilians in total disrespect for their lives and basic rights, with the aim of perpetuating and consolidating its illegal occupation of their territory. After nearly five decades of daily violations of their basic fundamental rights — including, among others, countless arbitrary arrests and detentions, extrajudicial killings and torture — and after almost five decades of confiscation of their private property, the demolition of their homes and forcible displacement, the least that the Palestinians of the occupied territories, in both the West Bank and Gaza, can expect from the Council, which under the Charter of the United Nations is entrusted with the maintenance of peace and security, is that, pending successfully ending the long-standing Israeli occupation, it takes all the necessary measures to ensure their protection, both as individuals and as a people, including stopping all forms of settlement activities on their land.

Let me now turn to the Syrian crisis. Last February's agreement on a cessation of hostilities has given Syria and its people a glimmer of hope that a settlement of the conflict has become a realistic possibility. We take this opportunity to commend Special Envoy De Mistura for the tremendous effort and time he has deployed to set the conditions for the achievement of the cessation of hostilities, guided by the work of the International Syria Support Group. We also recognize the leadership of the co-Chairs of the ceasefire task force, the Russian Federation and the United States, in supporting the cessation of hostilities, which resulted in a significant reduction in the number of civilian casualties and cleared the path for the resumption of the intra-Syrian talks in Geneva, which, based on the relevant Security Council resolutions, should lead to the achievement of a lasting political solution that meets the aspirations of the Syrian people to live in peace and dignity in a sovereign and unified country. Only such a solution could turn the present cessation of hostilities into sustainable civil peace by allowing the Syrian people to begin the long and arduous task of national reconciliation and reconstruction and paving the way for the return of Syrian refugees and displaced persons to their homes and livelihoods.

Having said that, until the eventual return of the 1.2 million Syrian refugees currently residing in Lebanon, we continue to reiterate our call to the international community to meet its pledges and to provide Lebanon with the necessary means to deal with that massive responsibility. Only adequate assistance that integrates humanitarian and developmental funding can enable Lebanon to provide for the needs of the refugees and offset some of the negative impacts that the protracted humanitarian crisis has left on my

country's economic growth and unemployment levels and the pressure on our infrastructure in the education, health, energy, water, sanitation and housing sectors.

It was just last month that my country was privileged to welcome the joint visit by the Secretary-General, the President of the World Bank and the President of the Islamic Development Bank. It was an important occasion for them to assess such needs at first hand. Five years into the conflict in Syria and after multiple donors conferences, in particular the one held in London in February, it is crucial to establish a follow-up mechanism to those conferences. In our statement before the General Assembly on 20 November 2015 (see A/70/PV.59), we detailed our proposal regarding such a mechanism to enable follow-up with donors regarding the fulfilment of their pledges. Today, we reiterate our call for such action.

For Lebanon, the joint visit also provided a significant message of international support and solidarity to help it maintain stability and security. In that context, my Government has stressed the need to fully implement resolution 1701 (2006) and to put an end to Israeli violations of my country's sovereignty by land, air and sea. We would also like to point out that paragraph 10 of resolution 1701 (2006) requests the Secretary General

> "to develop, in liaison with relevant international actors and the concerned parties, proposals ... for the delineation of the international borders of Lebanon, especially in those areas where the border is disputed or uncertain".

We also recall that, among the chief purposes of the United Nations, as stated in Article 1 of the Charter of the United Nations, is

> "to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace".

My Government has also sought the good offices of the Secretary-General in the delineation of the disputed maritime border and the exclusive economic zone between Lebanon and Israel, emphasizing that the non-resolution of the issue would remain a source of conflict that threatens peace and security in our region.

Let me conclude by going back to where I started in order to stress again the urgent need for the Council to put an end to the settlement activities in the occupied State of Palestine and to provide international protection to the Palestinians living under occupation. A failure to do so would not only constitute a moral and political abdication, it would amount to granting Israel permission to continue its blatant violation of the numerous resolutions of the Council and the General Assembly on the question of Palestine, let alone the principles enshrined in the Charter and the rules of international law. In fact, the Council's failure to live up to its responsibilities made it possible for Mr. Netanyahu to declare on Saturday,

> "It's time that the international community finally recognizes that the Golan will forever remain under Israeli sovereignty."

Is it not, rather, time for the international community, represented by the Council, to remind Mr. Netanyahu of Israel's obligations under resolution 497 (1981), which reaffirms the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force, and to condemn his declaration in the strongest possible terms?

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Al-Mouallimi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, allow me once again to express to the President our appreciation for his wise leadership of the Security Council during this month and to wish you every success. I also wish to thank you for convening this open debate on the situation in the Middle East. Allow me also to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing this morning.

It is also my pleasure to refer to the important statement delivered by His Excellency the President of the People's Republic of China before the Council of the League of Arab States at the beginning of the year, on 21 January, when he specifically called again for an end to the historical injustice done to the Palestinian people, referring also to the need to enable that people to exercise their right to establish their own sovereign Palestinian State, based on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. We wish to express our appreciation for all the efforts by friendly China and for the President's efforts in that regard.

We meet today once again as Israel pursues its aggressive terrorist practices as well as its grave violations of international law. Israel persists in challenging international legitimacy, with no fear of sanctions or accountability. We have called on the Council again and again to compel Israel to end its war crimes and its violations of human rights, which

it has been perpetrating despite the unanimity in the international community on the illegitimacy of Israel's colonialist policies and arbitrary practices against the Palestinian people. It seems that the Security Council remains timid vis-à-vis the need to end Israeli aggression, to make Israel responsible for that aggression and to make it accountable for its ongoing, repeated crimes against the Palestinian people.

Israel continues to use excessive force against the Palestinian people. It has detained thousands of Palestinians. They are tortured, they are exploited, and many are simply being killed in the field. Despite its ongoing acts of terrorism, Israel now claims that it is committed to the two-State solution. We wonder: what two States are the occupier talking about? Settlements continue to be built without any restraint. Land and properties are being confiscated. Homes are being demolished. Families are being expelled. There are acts of forcible displacement. Does the Council not know, for example, that Israel took a decision to build 200 new settlements in the West Bank just days ago? Israel continues to implement its illegal plans to annex the Holy City of Al-Quds, distorting its Arab identity, changing its demographic makeup and isolating it from the Palestinian community. It continues its ongoing attempts to change the legal status of the Holy Al-Aqsa Mosque, wishing to lay its hands on Islamic and Christian properties in Al-Quds and Haram Al-Sharif. What two States is Israel talking about?

Matters have reached a point where the Israeli occupation Government holds meetings in occupied Arab Syrian Golan, which is a grave development. The occupying Power is demanding that the international community recognize its occupation of the Golan. It claims that the Golan is an indivisible part of the State of Israel in the modern era, that the Golan Heights will remain in Israeli hands forever. That is a clear violation of resolution 497 (1981), as well as of all international instruments, which do not accept a change of status for occupied territories. We condemn in the strongest terms such declarations and such acts of aggression. We call upon the Council to compel Israel to implement all United Nations resolutions concerning its withdrawal from all Palestinian lands beyond the pre-1967 borders and all Arab occupied lands, including the occupied Arab Syrian Golan.

Against that backdrop, my delegation would once again like to welcome the French initiative to convene an international peace conference, as this would contribute to peace and security in the region, in accordance with the terms of reference of the peace process, the Arab Peace Initiative and the relevant Security Council resolutions. We must devise an effective international mechanism that ensures that an end is put to the Israeli occupation of the State of Palestine within a set time frame.

The Palestinian people have long suffered from a brutal occupation, policies of racism and arbitrary repression. We commend the Palestinian people for their steadfastness and for defending their people and their holy sites. We call on the Security Council to ensure that the Israeli Government bears criminal responsibility for its actions. Israel must be called upon to immediately release all detainees and prisoners and immediately respond to the resolutions of international legitimacy and the Arab Peace Initiative.

We also reiterate our call to ensure a quick intervention so as to provide international protection to the Palestinian people. We appeal to the Security Council to respond in a manner that is commensurate with the gravity of the situation and to grant the Palestinian people their right to self-determination and their independent State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, on the borders of June 1967.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia wishes to express its grave concern at the continuing suffering of the brotherly Syrian people. Despite the efforts made to resolve the Syrian crisis; the adoption of resolutions 2254 (2015) and 2268 (2016); and the cessation of hostilities and the delivery of humanitarian assistance, with a view to the resumption of official negotiations on a political transition and the full implementation of Geneva I, these violations by the Syrian forces continue. Syrians are being killed and maimed on a daily basis. Their cities are being destroyed, including through the use of weapons with indiscriminate effects, including barrel bombs.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards are also present in Syria, as are Hizbullah militias, which are terrorist militias that have participated in the criminal acts perpetrated by the Syrian regime against its people. These represent grave continuing escalations that could have terrible repercussions on peace and security in the region and the entire world.

We would also like to express our grave concern at the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Syria. A siege continues to be imposed on many cities and

regions, including Daraya, where dozens of women and children are protesting on their destroyed homes against the fact that international parties are ignoring them and will not act to lift the siege.

My delegation reiterates its support for the United Nations Envoy to Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, within the mandate entrusted to him and resolution 2254 (2015), which set out the road map for official political negotiations on a political transition.

We wish to stress that we will continue to support the Syrian people by all means available and to respect their decisions. We call for the establishment of a transitional authority with full executive powers to build Syria's future. Syria, whose sons, whatever their political, religious or ethnic origins, reject terrorism and violence, has no place in it for those whose hands are stained with the blood of the Syrian people.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Ms. Lodhi (Pakistan): Today more than ever, the Middle East is a cauldron of conflict. War and suffering have steadily spread from their epicentre, the Palestinian-Israeli dispute in the Holy Land. The prospects for peace between Israel and the Palestinians are abysmal. The current Israeli leadership is fast closing off the possibility of a two-State solution, formally accepted by the parties and the international community. It is doing this willfully, through its policy of expanding settlements, demolitions and incitement, accompanied by the refusal to engage in a meaningful dialogue to implement the internationally agreed two-State solution.

Violence by the occupation forces against Palestinian children, women and other innocent Palestinians continues. Illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem increased by 250 per cent during the first three months of this year as compared with the last.

A report of the Office of the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process last week rightly acknowledged that the viability of a two-State solution was in danger. There is an ever-present danger of another intifada if a credible peace process is not revived rapidly. Unless the Israeli Government agrees to resume the implementation of the two-State solution and halts and reverses its policy of expanding settlements, the Security Council must, in accordance with its mandate and its own resolutions, adopt a concrete and legally binding plan to implement the two-State solution and take the necessary measures for its enforcement.

A two-State solution was promised by the international community to the Palestinian people. This promise was a solemn one and must be kept. An independent, contiguous and viable state of Palestine, based on the pre-1967 borders and with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, is and must remain our objective.

Pakistan, for its part, remains committed to supporting the Palestinians in their decades-long legitimate struggle for their rights and for their dignity. The President of Pakistan reaffirmed this commitment when he met President Abbas at the Extraordinary Summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in Jakarta last month.

It will be difficult to resolve the other crises that have proliferated in the Middle East or to stem the rise of terrorism and extremism if the world does not find a just and durable solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Meanwhile, what was termed the Arab Spring has turned into a winter of despair and suffering. The scale of the suffering in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and elsewhere is unprecedented in its scope and intensity.

As we discuss solutions here today, people continue to endure unimaginable suffering, and their exodus has created a humanitarian catastrophe. There is an urgent need for statesmanship, diplomacy and dialogue. The political and ideological polarization in the region has exacerbated the consequences of external intervention, intensified sectarian and ethnic divisions and rendered political solutions more difficult.

The unity displayed by the international community in combating the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) is a critical first step. But these efforts will be successful only once the world has addressed the underlying reasons for the appeal of its toxic ideology to so many young and impressionable people in so many countries.

Syria recently marked the fifth anniversary of its conflict. Every succeeding year has been worse than the one before. The Syrian people continue to suffer unimaginable hardships. Atrocities are being committed by all sides.

We all agree that there is no military solution to this conflict. It is therefore critical that the fragile cessation

of hostilities be maintained and that the proximity talks in Geneva, reconvened last week, at least chart a way forward towards a negotiated settlement.

We support the efforts of the Secretary-General's Special Envoy to Syria, Staffan de Mistura, and hope that all sides will accord primacy to the interests of the Syrian people in evolving a durable political solution to this vicious conflict, in accordance with the principles of the United Nations Charter.

Positive signs are also emerging from Yemen. A truce was agreed last week and, although the direct face-to-face dialogue that was to be initiated in Kuwait earlier today has encountered a difficulty, we hope that will be temporary. We note with hope the statement of Special Envoy Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed in the Council last week that,

> "[we] have never been so close to peace." (*S/PV.7672, p. 4*).

It will not be easy to restore peace and stability in the Middle East. Beyond diplomacy and a genuine commitment on the part of all Powers and parties to negotiated solutions, a comprehensive and enlightened policy is needed to address and overcome the underlying political, economic and social causes of those conflicts.

My country stands ready to make its contribution to the construction of a new and peaceful order in the Middle East.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Dehghani (Islamic Republic of Iran): Before I deliver my statement, let me offer my condolences to the peoples and the Governments of Japan and Ecuador for the loss of lives as a result of the recent earthquakes.

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries (NAM), and to convey the Movement's appreciation to the Chinese presidency for convening this open debate at this critical juncture for the Palestine people and the Middle East. I also thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

Given the time constraints, I will deliver an abridged version of my statement. The full text will be circulated.

Each and every time the Council holds an open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including question of Palestine, NAM appeals for international attention and urgent action to address the illegal and brutal Israeli occupation that is causing so much anguish to the Palestinian people, provoking deep anger and frustration and inflaming tensions. The breaches of international law, including humanitarian and human rights law, that are being committed by Israel, the occupying Power, are inflicting widespread human suffering and are deliberately destabilizing the situation, with far-reaching and serious consequences for the prospects for a peaceful solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and for peace and security in the Middle East and beyond.

Each time, we repeat our call to the international community, first and foremost the Security Council, to uphold the Charter of the United Nations and international law and the obligations to respect those instruments and ensure such respect, including through the necessary measures to compel Israel to end its war crimes and human rights violations against the Palestinian people and end the illegal foreign occupation of another people's land.

Regrettably, the Security Council has failed to uphold its obligations, despite the clear global consensus on both the illegality of Israel's policies and practices in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, and the urgency of ending this decades-long conflict so that the Palestinian people can finally realize the freedom, rights and justice they have for too long been unjustly denied.

Israel, the occupying Power, has been emboldened by that inaction on the part of the international community, which has enabled it to act with impunity. Consequently, it has intensified its illegal, oppressive measures against the defenceless Palestinian civilian population, including, inter alia, by using excessive force against Palestinian civilians, including children and women, causing death and injury. As the occupying Power builds and expands more illegal settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, which constitutes not only a grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention but also a war crime as defined by the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. Israel also continues with its illegal, repressive and punitive measures, including home demolitions, leaving countless Palestinian families homeless and without hope. The destructive impact of such Israeli violations is immense, as reflected in the increasing tensions, deteriorating socioeconomic

conditions and deepening frustration and despair among the Palestinian civilian population, which has been living under the Israeli occupation for nearly half a century.

Moreover, the humanitarian disaster deliberately inflicted on the Gaza Strip by the occupying Power remains without redress, as the illegal Israeli blockade continues to obstruct the reconstruction of thousands of damaged and destroyed homes and infrastructure, and socioeconomic conditions continue to deteriorate as the blockade continues to have a suffocating effect on Gaza. The Palestinian civilian population there remains isolated from the rest of Palestine and the entire world. The situation of youth in Gaza is especially critical, as hope and opportunity are absent. We would draw the Council's attention to that critical aspect.

The Security Council must act in accordance with international humanitarian law to ensure the protection of the Palestinian civilian population under Israeli occupation. The Council must also act, in line with international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention and the Council's own resolutions, to bring a halt to Israel's ongoing illegal colonization of the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. That is a minimal and fundamental request to the Security Council and is not beyond the realm of reason, or its obligation for that matter.

How can the Council remain silent as Israel continues its systematic settlement policy, its construction of the wall, its confiscation and de facto annexation of Palestinian land under various pretexts, such as "State land" or "military exercises" or "building without permits"? Those and other systematic violations, including the demolition of homes, the forced displacement of Palestinian civilians, the arrest and detention of Palestinians, including children, and the incessant violence, terror and provocations by Israeli settlers and extremists, including at sensitive religious sites, particularly the Al-Aqsa Mosque, in occupied East Jerusalem, have persisted in an unabated fashion, worsening the extremely fragile situation on the ground. Such violations must be addressed immediately, because it is unacceptable to allow Israel to enjoy impunity without suffering the consequences of its actions. Any justification for such criminality must be rejected, and the time is past due to act, in line with United Nations resolutions, international law and our moral responsibilities towards the question of Palestine.

Finally, at a time when the Palestinian people are facing increasing Israeli aggression and have rapidly declining hope for the possibilities for peace and justice, the Non-Aligned Movement seizes this opportunity to reaffirm its long-standing solidarity with the Palestinian people, recognizing their decades of resilience despite so much suffering and injustice. NAM reiterates its support for the realization of their legitimate national aspirations and inalienable rights, including their right to self-determination and freedom in an independent and viable State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, as well as for a just solution to ease the plight of the Palestine refugees, in accordance with resolution 194 (III), of 1948.

Lebanon continues to suffer from continuous Israeli violations of its borders and incursions into its territory, which have been followed by years of occupation and aggression. Unfortunately, Israel still continues to violate Lebanese airspace, intensifying its incursions over Lebanon. Such activities are a blatant violation of Lebanese sovereignty and the relevant international resolutions, in particular resolution 1701 (2006). The provisions of that resolution should be implemented in a manner that ensures the strengthening of the foundations of stability and security in Lebanon and prevents Israel from undertaking its daily violations of Lebanese sovereignty.

With regard to the occupied Syrian Golan, and especially in view of the recent blatant defiance exhibited against the will of the international community, the Movement condemns all the measures taken by Israel, the occupying Power, to alter the legal, physical and demographic status of the occupied Syrian Golan, which have intensified after the outbreak of the Syrian crisis. NAM demands once again that Israel abide by resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw fully from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967, in implementation of resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of India.

Mr. Lal (India): I thank you, Sir, for convening this open debate. We also thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive briefing earlier today.

India has long had a clear and consistent position on the Middle East peace process. We support a negotiated solution that would result in a sovereign, independent, viable and united State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem

as its capital, within secure and recognized borders, side by side and at peace with Israel, as endorsed in the Quartet road map and the relevant Security Council resolutions. India's approach to Palestine is built upon three core dimensions of solidarity with the Palestinian people: support for the Palestinian cause, support for Palestine's nation-building and support for Palestine's capacity-building efforts.

Our continued commitment to the Palestinian cause and our friendship with the Palestinian people remain an integral part of our foreign policy. That is reflected in the ongoing high-level exchanges, such as visits to Palestine by Indian leaders in the recent months, including our President, Prime Minister and Minister for External Affairs.

As part of our ongoing support for the nation-building efforts of Palestine, India has consistently extended technical and financial assistance to that country. India contributes $1 million annually to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. India also contributed $4 million in response to the National Early Recovery and Reconstruction Plan for Gaza.

We are concerned that, since the previous attempts at serious direct talks, which broke down two years ago, there has been a downward trend in the peace process, despite efforts to hold serious negotiations between the parties — efforts that have been inconclusive. Instead, we have seen an unfortunate escalation of tension in Gaza. Unilateral actions by the parties are, unfortunately, moving them further apart. India remains firmly convinced that dialogue is the only viable option that can effectively address the issue. We remain hopeful and urge both sides to resume the peace process soon in order to reach a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the Palestinian issue.

In Yemen, India has been urging all of the parties concerned to resolve their differences amicably with a view to finding a consensus-based solution. We are encouraged by the planned peace talks and hope that those talks will commence soon and lead to positive outcomes.

With regard to Syria, India has consistently called for a comprehensive political solution to the conflict based on bringing all parties to the negotiating table. We hope that the intra-Syrian talks held under the auspices of the United Nations will ensure a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political transition, bringing an end to the violence there and contributing to the stabilization of the country and the region.

The humanitarian situation in Syria and neighbouring countries has to be addressed effectively. India has contributed $4 million in humanitarian assistance for Syrian refugees. India also participated in the London conference on Syria in February and has committed to providing bilateral humanitarian assistance to Syria.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Iraq.

Mr. Mashkoor (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, allow me to congratulate the People's Republic of China on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of April. We would like to thank you, Sir, for convening this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. I would also like to congratulate Angola for its wise leadership of the Council last month.

The policies of Israel, the occupying Power, rely heavily on building more settlements on lands that have been confiscated from their Arab owners, on extracting the natural resources and on subjecting the Palestinian economy and market to the laws of the occupying Power. The end purpose is to control the future of the Palestinian people and prevent their sustainable development. Settler colonialism can be considered to be the strategic, military pillar of the policy to Judaize the occupied territories and to impose a fait accompli on the Arab States and the Palestinians in negotiations. While there was a sincere intention on the part of the Arab party to end this long-standing dispute and to achieve a just peace, those policies have undermined peace efforts in the region.

The demolition of Palestinian homes by the Israeli occupation authorities will not bring peace to Israel. It is an inhumane act that runs counter to the right to housing. Israel also violates the standards of criminal law, which calls for the punishment of those who commit the crime in question. As such, criminal law cannot impose collective punishment on family members. Israel uses a policy of collective punishment that was prevalent in the Middle Ages. The siege on Gaza, the detentions, the increasing rate of violence and the imposition of collective punishment, as well as the provocations by Jewish extremist settlers, serve only to exacerbate tensions in Palestine and the Middle East region in general. Iraq calls on the Security Council

to provide international protection for the Palestinian people in all of the occupied Palestinian territories, in accordance with the relevant international conventions and international humanitarian law, in order to put an end to the unprecedented violations committed against the sacred shrines in Jerusalem, including Al-Aqsa Mosque. We also call on the Council to ensure the complete withdrawal of Israel from the occupied territories to the borders of 1967, in accordance with resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

Iraq welcomes the French initiative on the convening of an international conference on the Palestinian question and the peace process. We would hope that the initiative would lead to tangible results by providing an international political impetus for the peace process and by addressing all the issues that have made it difficult to arrive at a peaceful solution to end the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories. We would also hope that it would ensure the establishment of a viable Palestinian State that can exist in peace and assume its place in the international community. However, as a result of the intransigence of Israel, which does not believe in the Palestinian right to self-determination or to recovery of the usurped territories, Iraq does not expect that any international conference can succeed. The experience of past conferences does not encourage us to expect anything more than diplomatic courtesies, which do not really respond to the suffering of our Palestinian brothers living under occupation.

We would like to express our solidarity with our brothers in occupied Palestine and their struggle, which is legitimate under the rules of international law, for the establishment of an independent, contiguous and viable Palestinian, with East Jerusalem as its capital, based on the 1967 borders. We urge the relevant international parties to move faster and overcome the impediments that have made it difficult to achieve the two-State solution.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Djani (Indonesia): Let me begin by expressing the appreciation of my delegation to the presidency of the People's Republic of China for convening this open debate, and to the Secretary-General for his briefing.

My delegation would also like to take this opportunity to express condolences to the Governments of Ecuador and Japan for the tragic loss of lives resulting from the devastating earthquakes last week.

Indonesia associates itself with the statement delivered by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, and with the statement to be delivered by the representative of the State of Kuwait on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

This debate comes at a time when there is increasing global concern about the prospects for peace in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Last January, the Secretary-General spoke about the growing frustration, alienation and despair felt by the Palestinians with regard to the prolonged occupation of their homeland. Since then, violence in the occupied Palestinian territory has continued to grow at an alarming pace. No progress can be seen in the efforts to halt the violence or address the injustice and oppression committed against Palestinians. Indonesia is following with deep concern that troubling development. Not only does the continued violence reflect the hurdles on the way of peace, it also symbolizes the hardening of suspicion and animosity between the two peoples, which could hinder efforts to restart the political process.

Indonesia remains convinced that the occupation must be brought to an end and that all efforts must be exerted to achieve the two-State solution. Indeed, last month, the fifth Extraordinary Summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, hosted by the Government of Indonesia, drew the attention of the international community to the urgency of attaining a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine. The Summit also called on the international community to support the boycott of products produced in or by the illegal Israeli settlements.

Israel's continued construction of illegal settlements in and around East Jerusalem, along with other illegal activities, poses a further challenge to efforts to find a wise course of action. It is the responsibility of Israel, the occupying Power, to observe and comply with its international obligations, such as the protection of the fundamental rights of the Palestinian people and to prevent the occurrence of extrajudicial killings, which have been rampant in recent times. Israel must also realize that its restrictions on the movements of Palestinians and the arbitrary conduct of its security forces against Palestinians can only breed anger and

resentment and that it must refrain from committing collective punishment.

The United Nations has adopted hundreds of resolutions on the question of Palestine since the Organization was established. Last month, the Commission on the Status of Women adopted yet another resolution on the situation of Palestinian women, which Indonesia co-sponsored. Sadly, despite the overwhelming support of Member States for all resolutions on the question of Palestine, no substantial efforts have been undertaken to implement them. Indonesia has repeatedly called on the Security Council to delay no further in ensuring that Israel complies with international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions. The Council must also pave the way for the resumption of a credible peace process aimed at putting an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestine and the establishment of an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The world cannot wait any longer for us to hold briefings and closed consultations while people are losing their lives and the two-State solution is fading away. In that regard, I would like to express Indonesia's appreciation for the initiative on the part of the relevant parties to mobilize the support of the international community and push the peace process forward.

With regard to the conflict in Syria, Indonesia once again urges all concerned and interested parties to work hard to bring the conflict to an end and allow humanitarian assistance to reach all those in need. It is absolutely intolerable that the conflict, which has been ongoing for approximately five years, has dragged on for so long, with repercussions now being felt around the world. That fact only underlines the imperative of an inclusive process involving all Syrians to settle the conflict.

Indonesia remains hopeful that the round of peace talks that began in Geneva last week will build the momentum needed for an inclusive political process. We commend the work of the United Nations in facilitating the talks, especially the dedication shown by the Special Envoy, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, and encourage all parties to the conflict to respect the goals of peace and humanity. We urge all Syrians to make full use of the current diplomatic impetus by swiftly reaching a political settlement that can serve as a basis for future peace and stability in Syria.

With respect to Yemen and Libya, we welcome the continued dialogue that could boost efforts to restore national unity and peace in the region. What is at stake are the lives of many innocent civilians.

Lastly, Indonesia remains steadfast in its commitments to ensuring peace and stability in the Middle East and will do its utmost to attain that noble objective.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of the Holy See.

Archbishop Auza: The Holy See commends China's presidency for bringing the topic of the Middle East to the attention of the international community through today's Security Council open debate.

The Holy See shares the grave concern of the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Nikolay Mladenov, that the two-State solution between Israel and Palestine is in danger of failing, as peace talks stall and inflammatory rhetoric, acts of terror and unilateral actions scupper efforts to restore a process of meaningful dialogue and compromise. In the face of such a frustrating scenario, Pope Francis pleads with both the Israeli and the Palestinian authorities to consider their own peoples' need for peace and courageously pursue the path of dialogue, reconciliation and peace, because there is simply no other way.

During his May 2014 visit to Jordan, Palestine and Israel, Pope Francis expressed special concern for the Holy City of Jerusalem, the patrimony of the world's monotheistic religions and a city of universal importance:

> "Jerusalem means, of course, 'city of peace'. This is what God wills it to be, and such is the desire of all people of goodwill."

Yet sadly, Jerusalem remains deeply troubled because of long-standing conflicts.

The Holy See firmly believes that the two-State solution provides the best possibility for a peaceful settlement. Pope Francis reiterated that position at Tel Aviv Airport, when he pleaded both for a universal recognition of the right of the State of Israel to exist and to flourish in peace and security within internationally recognized borders, and for the creation of a viable State of Palestine, a sovereign homeland in which the Palestinians can live in peace, dignity and freedom.

The two-State solution must become a reality and not remain merely a dream.

My delegation wishes to reiterate the appeal that Pope Francis made to the Palestinian authorities on 25 May 2014 in Bethlehem:

> "The time has come for everyone to find the courage to be generous and creative in the service of the common good, and to find the courage to forge a peace which rests on the acknowledgment by all of the right of two States to exist and live in peace and security within internationally recognized borders."

The Holy See hopes that the comprehensive agreement between the Holy See and the State of Palestine, which came into full force on 2 January 2016, will encourage all parties to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to engage sincerely in a negotiated and peaceful solution. In the complex reality of the Middle East, the Holy See hopes that the agreement may serve as an example of dialogue and cooperation, in particular for other Arab- and Muslim-majority countries in the region.

The Holy See reiterates its appeal that special attention must be given to Lebanon, where refugees from neighbouring conflicts constitute nearly a quarter of the population. The Parliament of Lebanon must act to elect a President. Soon Lebanon will have been without a President for two years, at a time of regional instability and the growth of vicious non-State actors. The international community must assist the leaders of Lebanon to constitutionally stabilize their own Government and deal with the immense burden of the refugee population.

My delegation also calls on the international community to take collective political action to stem the spread of the fundamentalism and extremism, which have sown terror in so many countries in the region, in North Africa and in many parts of the world. The internationalization of terror can be countered only by a collective international response. Ideological terror cannot be effectively defeated by military action alone; it must be tackled by also addressing the root causes upon which international terrorism feeds. The lie and blasphemy of terrorist groups that claim to kill and oppress in the name of religion must be openly denounced in the strongest possible terms. Religious leaders in particular have a grave responsibility to condemn fellow believers who use their religion as a justification for violence.

Finally, the Holy See appeals once again to the international community to hear the cries of the beleaguered communities of Christians and other ethnic and religious minority groups in the Middle East, which are being discriminated against, persecuted, slaughtered, set afire or drowned because they do not share the ideological or religious views of their persecutors. Their very peaceful enculturation as minorities into the majority culture has made them particular targets for the extremist violence that has forced them to flee their homes and abandon their properties and homeland, risking everything as they cross inhospitable deserts and perilous seas in search of calmer shores and welcoming communities, which, unfortunately, they do not always find. My delegation therefore hopes that Pope Francis's visit two days ago to the migrants and refugees stranded on the Greek island of Lesbos has touched many hearts.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Jordan.

Mrs. Kawar (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your presidency of the Security Council this month, as well as to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing. I would also like to offer our deep condolences to the Government and the people of Japan and to the families of the earthquake victims there.

Our region is dealing with many political and intellectual challenges and a very complex reality. Words are simply inadequate to express the fear and suffering that the peoples of the region are enduring, whether in the occupied Palestinian territory, Syria, Yemen or other countries. The increasing gravity of the conflicts is forcing us to ask whether the international community's intervention, through the resolutions and international instruments adopted at the United Nations, is enough. Have we failed to ensure lasting stability?

Jordan made major efforts during its membership of the Security Council to try to arrive at realistic solutions to the conflicts in the Middle East. We have often voiced our vision in that regard, emphasizing that the main issue is still the question of Palestine and the lack of a just and lasting solution to it, which continues to undermine previous efforts to resolve the problem of the Middle East. We cannot ignore the inherent link between a solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and

peace in the region. We need a comprehensive approach to its various aspects and a genuine effort on the part of the international community to reach a lasting solution that will prevent violence and extremism from exploiting this vacuum and expanding the crisis to the entire region and the rest of the world.

Israel's daily illegal violations — its demolitions of homes, forced expulsions and displacements of residents and attempts to change the status quo, first and foremost through methodical colonial expansion — are outrageous. We condemn them and urge the Council to live up to its responsibility and to take steps immediately to end the colonization in the West Bank and Jerusalem, which is a violation of international law. Israel's actions on the ground run counter to its declarations and stated positions and hinder every effort to re-launch the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations.

We therefore reaffirm the need for serious efforts to pursue negotiations on a two-State solution within defined parameters, including a specific timetable for arriving at an agreement on an independent Palestinian State, within the June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, based on the relevant international initiatives and the Arab Peace Initiative. This should also aim to guarantee the supreme vital interests of Jordan, which are linked to all the aspects of a definitive solution. Jerusalem, the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Al-Haram Al-Sharif have a very particular significance for His Majesty King Abdullah II ibn Al Hussein, owing to the historical custodianship of Jordan, which is the guarantor of the Muslim and Christian holy sites and has spared no effort to defend them against the Israeli authorities' unilateral and illegal acts of aggression towards the Holy City.

As it has always done, Jordan will firmly oppose all who try to violate the holy sites. Under its custodianship, Jordan will continue to explore every possibility for taking diplomatic and legal steps to end Israel's violations and acts of aggression. We consider its actions to be null and void, particularly because they are carried out by an occupying Power that by its very nature cannot be held accountable for its acts. Any regional or international initiative to resolve the conflict will remain mere empty words if we do not demonstrate the political will and international commitment needed to move forward. We continue to await a serious display of commitment and engagement to peace on the part of Israel, and we demand that Israel end its activities in the occupied territory. This is not just a demand by the Palestinians; it is an international demand with the goal of saving a people who are being deprived of their basic rights to dignity and security.

I turn now to the crisis in Syria, which has caused unspeakable destruction and displaced millions of people. We must redouble our efforts to support the United Nations and to ensure the success of the current negotiations on a political agreement based on the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and the relevant Security Council resolutions, particularly resolution 2254 (2015). Jordan reiterates its support for the efforts of Mr. Staffan de Mistura and the International Syria Support Group. We hope the negotiations will enable the parties to achieve a political transition and assure the establishment of a constitution and secure governance that can help to restore security and stability to Syria and enable its refugees to return and begin a new era in their country's history.

The numbers and flows of refugees from Syria to its neighbours and to Europe continue to increase and are living proof of the enormous humanitarian tragedy in Syria, which threatens to blow up the entire region. Jordan will continue to take the high moral and humanitarian ground and to fulfil its duty to Syria's refugees. The heavy burden we have taken on is exhausting our limited resources. It is therefore essential that the international community abide by its commitments, live up to its responsibilities and provide us with assistance in accordance with its pledges at the London conference in February, so as to enable Jordan and the other countries hosting refugees to cope with their growing burden. Jordan proposed a comprehensive new approach at the conference for dealing with the humanitarian crisis of the Syrian refugees, focused on finding durable solutions based on international development. We call on the international community to support our appeal for the period from 2016 to 2018.

While it is essential to fight terrorist groups, it is also crucial that we deal with the underlying causes of their activity. We have become victims and hostages to their activities in the region, which are preventing our countries from achieving their aspirations as they find themselves still living under the threat of terrorism. We must unite the international efforts to eradicate such groups, which exploit religion, and point out that their Takfiri views have nothing to do with the Muslim faith; on the contrary, they are targeting the Muslim faith. The activities of such terrorists not only hurt Islam, they represent an attack on all monotheistic religions

and the humanist principles that hold human life sacred and privilege mind and logic.

It is therefore essential that international efforts be concerted to confront such groups, in particular Da'esh. We need to strengthen young people's involvement in society, so that they can resist the influence of extremist thought and terrorism. That is what we have done through the adoption of resolution 2250 (2015), with regard to youth, peace and security.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of South Africa.

Mr. Zaayman (South Africa): South Africa would like to thank you, Sir, for having convened this debate. We also join others in thanking the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, for his briefing.

Unfortunately, the reports that we receive every month confirm that the situation in Palestine is deteriorating daily, while the international community, including the Security Council, remains unwilling or unable to deal with the matter.

South Africa aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, and we wish to make the following additional comments.

Let me start by reiterating South Africa's condemnation of all forms of violence, regardless of who the perpetrators are, and we again urge all parties to engage in dialogue. Unfortunately, the situation on the ground in Palestine and Israel today has set back earlier gains, and should the parties agree to re-start the negotiations, they will have to focus again on basic elements of a peace aimed at creating an enabling environment for negotiations. We have consistently warned that the situation on the ground will change to such a degree that the future of a two-State solution will become more and more elusive. Unfortunately, we are perilously close to that scenario becoming a reality.

Notwithstanding the grim picture, a small glimmer of hope remains. We noted that Israel and Jordan were able to reach an agreement on monitoring Israeli activity around the Temple Mount, or Al-Haram Al-Sharif. That agreement is timely, and we hope that it will de-escalate tensions and prevent violence, especially with Passover approaching. It is essential that the importance of those holy sites to a variety of major religious groups be respected equally by all parties. South Africa rejects the use of holy sites to incite violence. Because there is no progress on negotiations, including on the status of Jerusalem and its holy sites, it is imperative to maintain the so-called post-1967 status quo. Although far from ideal, we believe that those measures would contribute to limiting provocations and reducing violence.

The Council's failure is clearly demonstrated by the continued expansion of the Israeli settlements, which are illegal under international law. Israel's appropriation of land continues unabated. On 15 March, Israel announced the appropriation of 579 acres of land in the occupied West Bank near Jericho, the largest seizure of West Bank land in recent years. The building of those settlements is not only contrary to international law, but it represents an obstacle to a two-State solution and peace. We sincerely hope that all Council members will uphold their responsibilities under the Charter of the United Nations and put an end to the illegal appropriation of land. South Africa stands ready to work with all parties and the broader international community, including members of the Security Council, to advocate for the immediate cessation of settlement activities by Israel in the West Bank and Jerusalem.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Cuba.

Ms. Rodríguez Abascal (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Cuba endorses the statement made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

The situation in the Middle East continues to be a source of constant concern for the international community, which has been reflected in the numerous previous debates organized by the Security Council. Despite the periodic open debates held by the Council on the issue, which have demonstrated overwhelming support for the Palestinian cause, the Council has not been able to adopt a single resolution demanding from Israel to put an end to its aggressive policies, settlement activities, war crimes and the collective punishment committed against the Palestinian people, which are in clear and deliberate violation of international law and international humanitarian law. Those actions constitute a threat to regional and international peace and security by depriving the Palestinian people of its fundamental human rights.

The inaction of the Council with regard to such acts is alarming. It is unacceptable that the Security Council continues to be held hostage to the power

emanating from the use or the threat of the use of the veto to prevent the Council from fulfilling its mandate and protecting the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. It is morally unacceptable that the Security Council continues to shirk from its responsibility under the Charter of the United Nations with regard to maintaining international peace and security within the context of this conflict.

The international community calls on the Council to fulfil its responsibility and spare no effort in making the necessary decisions to end the occupation, the various forms of aggression, the illegal settlements, the flagrant, massive and systematic violations of human rights, State terrorism, extrajudicial executions, economic strangulation and collective punishment, for which Israel is responsible. Israel must also end its outright rejection of and disrespect for the provisions of numerous resolutions of the General Assembly. Those actions threaten the viability of a Palestinian State and the possibility to resolve the conflict in a fair and balanced manner.

The only possible solution to the Palestinian question is the peaceful coexistence of two States. An independent, sovereign and viable Palestine, existing within the pre-1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital, deserves global respect and solidarity. Cuba is convinced that a just and lasting solution to the demands of the Palestinian people to exercise their rights is fundamental to resolving the conflicts and easing the tensions in the Middle East. Cuba reaffirms its full support for the admission of Palestine as a full Member of the Organization and calls on the Security Council to decide on and accept without delay Palestine's application from 2011 to be recognized as a State Member of the United Nations, as clearly desired by the vast majority of States in the Organization. The historical debt to the Palestinian people is enormous and must be repaid. The Council has the responsibility to take concrete action to end such a protracted injustice.

With regard to the situation in Syria, Cuba reiterates that it will be possible to achieve peace in that country only by respecting the right of the Syrian people to choose their own destiny. A political solution through dialogue and negotiation is the only viable solution to the conflict in that country. Cuba welcomes the cessation of hostilities and the new channels that are opening, aimed at providing a peaceful and negotiated solution to the conflict. We support the Syrian people in their aspirations to live in peace and choose their own destiny without outside interference. Those who have fuelled the conflict from the outside, with the stated goal of imposing regime change, are responsible for the thousands of civilian victims of the conflict.

We regret the loss of innocent lives as a result of the situation there and condemn all acts of violence taking place in that country against the civilian population. Promoting an interventionist agenda must not be allowed under the pretext of combating terrorism. We demand the cessation of the foreign presence in Syria, as it does not have the approval of its Government and is not working in coordination with its authorities.

The Security Council is a crucial organ for achieving the aims entrusted to the United Nations of safeguarding peace and achieving the well-being and the development all peoples deserve, including those of the Middle East. In respecting the mandate established by the Charter of the United Nations and in fulfilling the responsibilities pursuant to that mandate, the Council is called upon to promote a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the conflicts and disputes in the Middle East, which would make it possible to preserve the sovereignty, security and territorial integrity of all States in the region, which would in turn contribute in a decisive way to creating the conditions for the progress and well-being of all the peoples of the region.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Kuwait.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

I would like to express my sincere congratulations to you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of April. Please allow me also to express our appreciation for convening this timely debate to address the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. I also thank the Secretary-General for his important briefing on the current situation.

We meet again as the occupied Palestinian territory, in particularly the occupied city of Jerusalem, is enduring an unprecedented escalation of Israeli military aggression and terrorist attacks by Israeli settlers against the defenceless Palestinian people and their holy places, without political, legal or moral deterrents. The Security Council is meeting at a time when Israel is continuing its gross, systematic crimes and breaches

of international law, many tantamount to war crimes. Israeli arrogance and disrespect for agreements with the Palestinian side, as well as the total impunity it enjoys for its violations and crimes, have brought the situation to a dangerous juncture. Yet, regrettably, the Council remains silent, disregarding its duty for the maintenance of international peace and security and its commitment to protect civilians in armed conflict.

Since the previous debate, in January (see S/PV.7610), Israel, the occupying Power, has continued killing and injuring Palestinian civilians, especially youths. Since the current wave of unrest began, in October 2015, Israel's shoot-to-kill policy has claimed the lives of more than 204 Palestinian civilians, 48 of whom were children. Likewise, the Israeli military aggression and settler terrorism have left 17,000 Palestinians injured. Israel has also continued detaining, imprisoning, abusing and torturing thousands of Palestinians in its detention centres; destroying homes and infrastructure; and forcibly displacing Palestinians. In addition, Israel has used all other forms of ongoing collective punishment of Palestinian civilians, the most egregious of which is its inhumane, illegal blockade on the Gaza Strip, which amount to systematic human rights violations and grave breaches of international humanitarian law.

At the same time, Israel, the occupying Power, has persisted with its unlawful colonization of Palestinian land, including through the construction and expansion of settlements and the separation wall, especially in and around occupied East Jerusalem. All of those violations blatantly aim at illegally, forcibly and deliberately altering the character, status and demography of the occupied Palestinian territory, thereby destroying the viability of the two-State solution, based on the pre-1967 borders. In that regard, the OIC reiterates that all such acts by Israel, including in particular against the Christian and Islamic holy sites in occupied East Jerusalem, constitute a flagrant violation of international law and resolutions of international legitimacy. They fuel increased extremism, violence and racism, as well as religious conflict, all of which demand the urgent attention and action of the Security Council.

It is incomprehensible that Israel continues to perpetrate violations and crimes without a response or punishment. We once again call on the Council to assume its responsibility for providing the Palestinian people with international protection. The Council and the Conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention have clear responsibilities in ensuring the protection and security of the Palestinian people. It must be stressed that the right to security is not exclusive to Israel. Security is a right that should be provided to, and enjoyed by, all nations. The victims of this nearly five-decades-long illegal, foreign occupation should not be the exception.

At the same time, we should stress that an exit from the current crisis and the revival of peace prospects will not be possible without compelling Israel, the occupying Power, to end its illegal construction and expansion of its colonial settlements and the wall in occupied Palestine, including East Jerusalem. That is an urgent priority in line with the Security Council's own resolutions, and imperative for saving the two-State solution from demise.

I should note that the OIC, at its Extraordinary Summit held in Jakarta last month, called on the Council to uphold its Charter duties, as well as its legal and moral obligations to ensure accountability for the illegal actions perpetrated by the occupying Power, and to act to protect the Palestinian civilian population and end the pervasive, systematic and gross violations of their human rights. The OIC reiterates its call for a draft resolution that sets a specific timetable and practical steps to end Israeli occupation in all manifestations, including the illegal settlement regime, on the basis of the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative.

In conclusion, I wish to avail myself of this opportunity to reaffirm once more the OIC support for, and solidarity with, the Palestinian people in their endeavours to regain their inalienable rights, including their right to self-determination and independence in their own State on the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and to achieve a just solution to the question of Palestinian refugees, pursuant to the relevant United Nations resolutions — a solution that is long overdue and that remains a legal and moral responsibility for the Council to fulfil.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Wilfreid I. Emvula, Vice-Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Mr. Emvula: As we meet again for a periodic debate on the Palestinian question, and while there are rays of hope for the victims of other conflicts in the

region, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict shows no such sign. Indeed, were it not for the date stamp on the news reports, they would read like those from months and years ago.

Data published by the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics reveal that, in 2015, settlement construction increased vis-à-vis the preceding year. In early 2016, the demolition of Palestinian homes, the confiscation of Palestinian land and its being redesignated as so-called Israeli State land, as well as the displacement of Palestinians, have already exceeded those of all of 2015. So have the mass arrests of Palestinians and their long-term incarceration without a charge or trial, under the label of administrative detention, a practice that is illegal under international law. Those unilateral measures, taken at the expense of Palestinian rights and freedoms, mark a new and fairly disturbing phase in terms of the clash between international humanitarian law and the Israeli occupation of the West Bank.

Furthermore, despite repeated assertions that the situation could not remain the same following the 2014 war, Gaza is still under Israeli blockade and the pace of reconstruction remains inadequate for the needs of the Strip, while disbursement by donors of the funds pledged for the Strip's reconstruction continues to be painfully slow. Unfortunately, the few voices in Israel objecting to these policies and calling for constructive negotiations with the goal of reaching a just peace are facing increasing measures to silence them completely, for example through proposed legislation on non-governmental groups and on the suspension of members from the Israeli Parliament, which targets Arab members of the Knesset.

In 2015, the Security Council held 13 meetings to consider the Palestinian question, but failed to initiate any action. It is hoped that the Council will act and support the draft resolution currently being circulated by the Arab Group reiterating the Council's demand that Israel immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory. The non-permanent members of the Council, including the five members that also serve on the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, have actively engaged the Council on this issue, most recently through exploring options for a mechanism to protect the civilian population in the occupied Palestinian territory, on the basis of existing Council resolutions. We hope that such efforts will soon bear fruit. The Committee welcomes the recent efforts, most notably by the Government of France and the Middle East Quartet, to explore ways to overcome the obstacles that stalled the bilateral negotiations, and continues to offer its full support to those endeavours.

Without the combined efforts of the international community and the parties on the ground, the current situation, bleak as it already appears, will only get worse. In order to stop and reverse the spiral of violence, the Palestinian people have to regain the hope for a better future and for a free and sovereign State of their own that offers prospects for a dignified future, so that they and their children can feel that theirs is a movement forward, not a slide backwards into the abyss. We also hope that Palestinian reconciliation efforts will succeed.

For all of this to happen, the generic vilification of Palestinians, which at the moment is all too common in Israel, has to end. Such demagoguery leads to a dehumanization of Palestinians in the eyes of the Israeli public and, ultimately, to such incidents as the apparent extrajudicial execution of an injured and incapacitated Palestinian in Hebron by an Israeli soldier just a few weeks ago. The Committee welcomes the subsequent statements by Israeli officials that such actions are unlawful and illegitimate and that their perpetrators will be prosecuted, and hopes that actions will follow those words. The Committee also welcomes the clear and repeated rejection of violence by the Government of the State of Palestine, most recently again by President Abbas, including on Israeli television just over two weeks ago. I would like to reiterate here in the Council that the Committee condemns all forms of terrorism and regrets all losses of civilian life.

More needs to be done. In order for a peace to be agreed upon and then sustained, a modicum of trust has to be re-established. The Committee will do its utmost to contribute to this endeavour, for instance by providing a forum for exchanges between Palestinians and Israelis at its international meetings and continuing to encourage dialogue and synergies between civil-society organizations on both sides. One such example was a panel discussion on "Women's role in the search for Israeli-Palestinian peace", organized by the Working Group of the Committee during the sixtieth meeting of the Commission on the Status of Women.

Additionally, in March the Committee organized a round table on the legal aspects of the question of Palestine in Amman to enhance the capacity of the State

of Palestine to fulfil its obligations in the light of its recent accession to a host of international treaties and conventions. In two weeks, the Committee will hold the International Conference on the Question of Jerusalem in Dakar, organized jointly with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. In line with the mandate of the Committee, in the coming months a United Nations seminar on assistance to the Palestinian people will be held in Stockholm, focusing on how Palestine can work towards the Sustainable Development Goals under the occupation, and the United Nations International Meeting in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace, to be held in Paris, will examine how the international community can reinvigorate the peace process. The Committee welcomes active participation by all Member States and civil society organizations in these events.

I am fully conscious of the fact that warnings of impending doom have been given so often and for so long in the case of Israel and Palestine that many have become inured to them. The situation in the region should serve as a stark reminder of how quickly a catastrophe can break out. It is because the price of failure is too terrifying to contemplate that the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People will continue its strong efforts towards a peaceful and just solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which can be achieved only by ending the occupation, through the two-State solution on the basis of pre-1967 borders and the just resolution of all final-status issues.

Our efforts do not support the rights of one group at the expense of the other. Finding and sustaining a just peace is the only way in which Palestinian and Israeli societies can endure and prosper. Failure to achieve a peaceful solution would ultimately destroy both.

The Committee will continue to advocate and work towards the goal, enshrined in the United Nations Charter, that the Palestinian people, like all other peoples of the world, realize their right to self-determination. For this we will cooperate with our partners and all those who share our common values, those of the United Nations.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Nicaragua.

Mrs. Rubiales de Chamorro (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): Nicaragua wishes to reiterate its congratulations to the People's Republic of China for the outstanding work in the presidency of the Council this month and for having convened this extremely important debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine.

First and foremost, we would like to express our feelings of solidarity with the peoples and the Governments of Ecuador and Japan in the wake of the earthquakes that occurred, as well as to the victims and their families.

Nicaragua aligns itself with the statement delivered by the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and with the statement delivered by the representative of Namibia on behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Sixty-eight years have elapsed and we continue to denounce Israel's occupation and its expansionist policies, which undermine all efforts to achieve peace, while the Government of Israel continues to reject the establishment of an independent, sovereign and independent Palestinian State. Every time we address the Security Council on this topic, we express our opposition to the occupation, the suffering of the Palestinian people and its victims. However, the pleas of the Palestinian people and the voice of the international community continue to be neither heard nor heeded. And we see 5.5 million Palestinian refugees ignored in this global refugee crisis. They are ignored by those who continue to promote Israel's impunity and to obstruct a solution with regard to the ongoing use of the veto against the creation and recognition of a Palestine State as a full member of the community of nations.

On its seventieth anniversary, the United Nations adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (General Assembly resolution 70/1) as an effort to eradicate poverty and misery and create decent conditions for the common welfare of all peoples. But we must ask ourselves: Will it be possible for the Palestinian people to exercise that right to development? And, furthermore, will they be able to achieve the agreed Sustainable Development Goals if the political space for the Palestinian State is occupied by Israel?

The answer is obvious. The Palestinian economy is an economy of occupation, in particular in the Gaza Strip, which applies to all levels and in all spheres of the Palestinian people's lives — from the occupation of their lands, the use of their natural resources, the denial of their right to freedom of movement and the

return of refugees, the confinement of its citizens and the daily destruction of their infrastructure. With each passing day it fragments the little amount of territory that they have left and destroys with it any possibility of two States.

Once again, we condemn and reiterate that this vicious circle of agression-reconstruction-aggression must stop. Israel continues to colonize the occupied Palestinian territories, in particular East Jerusalem, in full view of an acquiescent international community. Urged on by the alarming increase and worsening of Israeli abuses of Palestinians, once again we again call on the Security Council to demand that Israel fully halt its occupation of Palestine, lift the criminal blockade of Gaza and release all Palestinian prisoners, to whom we reiterate our full solidarity.

Moreover, Nicaragua stands in solidarity with the Palestinian cause and demands the immediate creation of a Palestinian State based on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the capital, thereby laying the foundation for a just and lasting peace in the Middle East, with the two States — Palestine and Israel — living side by side in peace.

We cannot fail to note that the policies of interference, intervention and change of Governments undertaken by the NATO countries in the Middle East and North Africa have benefited Israel. They have diverted attention away from the needs of the Palestinian people and their struggle for a State, and at the same time it allows Israel to pursue more aggressive practices and policies against the region.

Peace in the Middle East does not just involve a solution for the Palestinian question, but must necessarily include Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon and all the occupied Arab territories — from the Syrian Golan Heights to the other occupied Arab territories. It is also imperative to end foreign interference and intervention in the region in order to finally bring about a region of peace and security for the Arab and Israeli peoples.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Norway.

Mr. Pedersen (Norway): Nothing would do more to pave the way for broader regional stabilization than finding a political settlement to the conflict in Syria. Norway fully supports the Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura's tireless efforts to that end. All sides bear a heavy responsibility to turn the talks into a credible negotiating process that can lead to a genuine political transition. That means that the parties must start tackling the difficult questions set out in resolution 2254 (2015). And that includes the establishment of credible, inclusive and non-sectarian governance, an inclusive transitional governing body and a process for drafting a new constitution. The parties also bear a heavy responsibility not to undermine the political process through detrimental actions on the ground.

The Syrian population has already endured the intolerable. The scale of destruction, death and hunger has been immense. Three out of four Syrians are now living in poverty. More than 2 million children are out of school. We urge the parties to ensure that the cessation of hostilities agreement is respected and that humanitarian access is improved, including for medical supplies. That is also crucial for the political process.

In February, donor countries pledged approximately $12 billion in support of Syria and the region for 2016-2020. The pledge for 2016 alone was $6 billion. That was an unprecedented pledge, but disbursements are lagging far behind schedule. It is time to honour the pledges that have been made.

Resolving the conflict between Israelis and the Palestinians remains vital for securing regional stability and prosperity and for international peace and security. We must seek to counter those who are eroding the vision of the two-State solution, either deliberately or by default. The status quo will not benefit anyone; maintaining it will only cause more instability. For every day the status quo continues, an opportunity for peace is missed. The occupation is deeply damaging to Israelis and Palestinians alike. The two-State solution is the only credible way towards viable and long-term peace. The parties themselves need to make greater strides to resolve the conflict. The current tensions call for immediate and coordinated steps by all sides. All violence must stop.

Israel must stop building settlements and stop house demolitions. The Palestinians must strengthen their institutions and implement essential reforms. The necessary political compromises must be found to improve the situation in Gaza. The responsibility for solving the conflict lies with the parties. At the same time, the international community needs to make greater efforts to ensure a just and agreed solution based on the two-State solution. It is also in our

interest to do so. We cannot let this conflict continue to aggravate the situation in a region that is already in turmoil. The Security Council must therefore live up to its responsibility.

Tomorrow in Brussels, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Norway will convene a meeting of the donor coordination group, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee. The Commmittee's goal is to build institutions for statehood and make the Palestinian economy as sustainable as possible, until the conflict is resolved. The aim of the meeting is to develop a plan for balancing the Palestinian budget. The plan will address matters such as plugging fiscal leakages, making the revenue-sharing arrangements between Israel and Palestine more effective and developing a sustainable Palestinian economy through growth and private sector investments. If the donors are to continue to develop a Palestinian State, there must be a credible political horizon for resolving the conflict. A sustainable economy is essential for a future independent Palestinian State, but the ultimate goal must be to resolve the conflict.

As we all know, it is difficult to make peace. The Security Council must show leadership and stake out a path that leads to the resumption of the peace process.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Republic of Korea.

Mr. Hahn Choonghee (Republic of Korea): I thank you, Sir, for convening this year's second quarterly open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

At the outset, I would like to extend the Republic of Korea's heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families of the victims of the earthquakes in Ecuador and Japan. The Republic of Korea is actively participating in international efforts aimed at rapid recovery in the affected areas.

The Republic of Korea expresses serious concern about the continuing violence between Israel and Palestine at the cost of many lives and the viability of the two-State solution. Genuine and lasting peace can never be imposed by one party's unilateral and coercive measures; rather, it can be achieved only through direct negotiations between the parties, based on mutual recognition and coexistence. The Republic of Korea joins the international call for the parties to end the violence and incitement, and to take confidence-building measures with a view to resuming negotiations and creating a viable framework for the two-State solution.

In particular, we take note of the recent report of the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, according to which the demolition of Palestinian homes and livelihood structures more than doubled in the period of October 2015 to March 2016, in comparison with the previous six months, and that the number of demolitions by mid-April of this year had already exceeded the total for 2015. Confidence-building measures, including ending settlement expansion in the occupied territory, are urgently required to create an environment that is more conducive to dialogue for sustainable peace between the parties.

We also express concern about the lack of unity among the Palestinian parties. Unity and consensus among the Palestinian people is a prerequisite to achieve peace and an independent, sovereign and democratic State. At the same time, the Republic of Korea calls for the Middle East Quartet to step up its mediation efforts and looks forward to seeing produce practical recommendations to advance the two-State solution.

With regard to Syria, the Republic of Korea welcomes signs of progress on the ground, including the stabilization of the security situation since the cessation of hostilities on 27 February, increased humanitarian access to some areas and the new round of intra-Syrian talks from 13 April. However, great concerns remain about the non-compliance by all parties with the agreed cessation of hostilities and the serious impediments to access to international humanitarian assistance for millions of Syrians in dire need, including the 4.6 million people in the besieged or hard-to-reach areas. Compliance with the agreed cessation of hostilities by all parties and guaranteed unhindered humanitarian access throughout the country are not only critical to creating conditions that promote the peace process, but that also hint at the results of such a process. The Republic of Korea once again urges all parties to strictly comply with the cessation of hostilities and urges the Syrian Government to guarantee full, sustained, and unimpeded humanitarian access. We support the efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General's Special Envoy, Staffan de Mistura, to reach consensus among the parties and to forge a road map for a viable political transition in Syria.

Turning to Yemen, the Republic of Korea expresses regret that the third round of peace talks — which were supposed to begin today in Kuwait — has been postponed. We urge all parties to strictly abide by the agreement on the cessation of hostilities and resume peace talks without further delay. The Republic of Korea reiterates its strong support for the critical role of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, in mediating between the parties in order to establish peace in Yemen.

With regard to Libya, the Republic of Korea welcomes the arrival of the Presidency Council in Tripoli on 30 March as a significant step towards the establishment of the Government of National Accord, in accordance with the Libyan political agreement and resolution 2259 (2015). Considering the grave threat from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and its attempts to further expand its influence into the central part of the country, establishing the Government of National Accord and normalizing its functions are more urgent than ever. The Republic of Korea urges all parties to put national security ahead of their own interests and to cooperate with the Presidency Council and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Martin Kobler, in this process. The Republic of Korea will join in international efforts for the stabilization and reconstruction of Libya.

The situation in the Middle East has long been one of the main items on the agenda of the Security Council. However, the peace process between Israel and Palestine has been stagnant for too long and the multifaceted crises in Syria, Yemen and other countries in the region have resulted in enormous human suffering in the region and beyond. The status quo is not sustainable. We still have the political momentum necessary to resolve these overdue conflicts and crises. The Republic of Korea once again urges all the parties to the conflicts to take the necessary measures to resolve them and bring about peace, and reiterates its commitment to play a constructive role to that end.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Sri Lanka.

Mr. Sabarullah Khan (Sri Lanka): Sri Lanka associates itself with the statement made by the representative of Iran on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries. I would like to make the following statement in my national capacity.

Conflicts in Syria and Yemen, an unprecedented refugee crisis and a surge in violent extremism have contributed to the growing instability across the Middle East region. In that context, the Palestinian question takes on added importance. Especially at this time of unprecedented unrest in the Middle East, when our focus is on Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant/Da'esh, and the exigent refugee crisis in Syria, the world must not forget the dire humanitarian situation of the Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territories, especially Gaza, where conditions are indefensible. We stress the urgent need for leadership in order to end the marginalization and oppression of Palestinians in their own land.

Sri Lanka supports the work of United Nations agencies in the occupied Palestinian territories, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian. Affairs, which keep the majority of the people in Gaza supplied with the bare necessities, including education. We reiterate the need for continued funding by the donor community to enable UNRWA to function effectively.

As Chair of the United Nations Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, Sri Lanka is particularly concerned about the escalating violence and the number of civilian casualties, which include infants.

The settlement activities in the occupied territories violate international humanitarian law, including the Geneva Conventions, and exacerbate incidents of violence in the region. The continuing practice of administrative detentions is another factor that exacerbates the situation in the occupied territories.

Movement restrictions in and out of Gaza continue to be a major problem for the economy and welfare of the people of Palestine. Restrictions on imports and exports are stifling economic growth. The continuing exploitation of natural resources in the occupied territories in violation of international humanitarian law has a negative impact on the rights of the Palestinian people.

My delegation calls for a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine and an end to the suffering of the Palestinian people. The ongoing settlement activities are illegal under international law, and the blockade of the Gaza Strip is yet another obstacle to

peace. Furthermore, settlers in the occupied Syrian Golan enjoy disproportionate benefits in terms of water and agricultural resources. Agricultural expansion and the exploitation of natural and agricultural resources in the area continues unabated.

Both parties to the conflict must create the environment needed to facilitate peace. There is an urgent necessity for mutual confidence-building measures in support of efforts to resume dialogue and substantive negotiations. Israel must protect the Palestinian civilian population in the occupied territories and desist from actions that are contrary to the established rules of international law and practice.

We recognize the security needs of Israel. The indiscriminate attacks against Israeli civilians will lead to a counterproductive cycle of violence. We urge both parties to respect international humanitarian law and exercise the utmost restraint for the sake of the safety of civilians and for the greater goal of peace.

It is important to remain engaged in seeking a just and durable solution to the situation in the Middle East. Sri Lanka supports the implementation of General Assembly resolutions on the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to statehood and the attainment of a two-State solution on the basis of the pre-1967 borders.

We are encouraged that, despite decades of disappointment, the people of Palestine have resolutely sustained their spirit and strength of purpose in order to obtain their legitimate rights, having prevailed over the considerable challenges facing them. We hope that the Palestinian people will work together to preserve national unity. That is imperative for the creation of a fully sovereign, independent Palestine.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Mounzer (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, Mr. President, I would like to congratulate you on your friendly country on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month.

Yesterday, the Israeli occupation Government held a meeting in the occupied Syrian Golan, which was a grave and very provocative step, one that reflects the fact that Israel is operating outside international law and is flouting the international community and the resolutions of the United Nations, namely and notably, resolution 497 (1981), which considers Israel's decision to impose its laws, authority and administration on the occupied Syrian Golan to be null and void and counter to international law. As the Syrian Arab Republic condemns in the strongest terms possible this aggressive behaviour which threatens to further inflame the region, we also call upon the United Nations and the Security Council to immediately intervene and condemn the holding of that meeting so as to ensure that such violations do not recur.

We were most displeased that the briefing of the Secretary-General this morning did not include a clear condemnation of that step taken by Israel, although nobody doubts that it is illegal and counter to the Charter of the United Nations and United Nations resolutions on the occupied Syrian Golan. We expect the Secretariat to respect the purposes and principles of the United Nations. We expect the Secretariat to clearly and openly condemn such steps. Failing to do so merely sends an ambiguous message to Israel. Either the United Nations condemns or it supports what Israel is doing in the occupied Syrian Golan.

Deluded is he who believes that the crisis obtaining in my country, Syria, will distract us from an inalienable right to recover the occupied Syrian Golan completely — that is, to the pre-1967 border. We stress again that such a right is open to neither negotiation nor bargaining. It has no statute of limitations, and any illegal Israeli practices will not change that right one iota. Proof of this fact is the position of our people in the occupied Syrian Golan, who stressed yesterday that the visit by Netanyahu and his occupation Government to the Golan would in no way change their minds and that, just as other colonizers have been ejected from Syria in the past, the Golan will be cleansed of the Israeli occupation sooner or later.

We stress that Israel will be legally pursued and brought to account for all the violations perpetrated in the occupied Syrian Golan, whether it be settlements, racist policies, the pillaging of the Golan's natural resources, including oil and water, support for terrorist groups in the separation zone, or the arbitrary detention of Syrians under occupation, especially the prisoners Siddqui Al-Maqt, Bashira Mahmoud, Amal Abu Saleh and Iyad Al-Jawhry, in addition to all other violations of international law, the Geneva Conventions and United Nations resolutions.

The United Nations and its States Members bear a historic, legal and moral obligation to end Israeli

occupation of Arab lands and establish an independent Palestinian State with full sovereignty and with Al-Quds as its capital, and to see to the return of Palestinian refugees to their homes, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III), of 11 December 1948. However, although many decades have gone by with all the documented accompanying Israeli violations of international law and human rights law, the Security Council has failed to live up to his responsibilities. We have witnessed no serious, genuine moves in that regard. The recent history is known to all, namely, the blind support for Israel by some influential members of the Security Council, which makes Israel believe that it stands above the law, that it will not be held to account. As a result, Israel insists on imposing occupation as a fait accompli, and has persisted in its settler colonialist and racist policies.

We have noted a great increase in settler activity. The size of the area where Israeli settlements have been implanted in the past two decades has increased by more than 182 per cent. The number of settlers has increased by 189 per cent in the same period. According to the latest reports, there are projects to build settler units in the occupied West Bank. In the first four months of this year, the number is three times greater than the number that was recorded in the same period last year.

The situation is no less grave in the occupied Syrian Golan. Israel continues to act there as well in an attempt to entrench its settler policies and its occupation of the Golan through expanding and building new settlements, providing financial incentives to bring in settlers through such projects as "Come to the Golan" or the so-called Farms Project, and, recently, through a plan designed to set up 18 new communities in the occupied Syria Golan. The President of the so-called Golan Regional Council declared that it is now preparing to absorb 1,500 new Jewish families in the Golan settlements.

The settlements do not just constitute a war crime, they are also part of a systematic Israeli policy to impose a fait accompli that will kill any chance of achieving peace in the region, entrench the occupation and destroy any hope of creating a contiguous and viable Palestinian State. Ironically, while some members of the Council say that the settlements are illegal and must end, not one step has been taken to stop the escalation of the settlement campaigns and no serious pressure has been brought to bear on Israel.

Lastly, if we want to retain whatever credibility remains at the United Nations, prevent all chances of war and improve the opportunities for peace in our region, the Organization must stop dealing with the Israeli occupation of Arab lands in such a routine manner, with no serious effort to reach real solutions on the ground. The United Nations, in particular the Security Council, must take measures aimed at ensuring full implementation of the relevant international resolutions on Israel's occupation of Arab land, in particular resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 497 (1981), and must compel Israel to withdraw completely from the occupied Syrian Golan to the lines of 4 June 1967.

We note that every time Israel escalates its aggression against the Palestinian people or in the occupied Syrian Golan, some delegations escalate the misleading language of their statements about Syria, all in an attempt to distract attention from Israel's crimes and reduce international pressure on it. To avoid falling into that cheap trap, I will not use this statement on the situation in the occupied Arab territories to respond to the empty claims that some delegations have made about Syria. We have many ways to refute such claims by countries that support, harbour and arm terrorists, help to spread extremism and destruction in Syria and have sought actively to block any efforts to reach a peaceful settlement of the crisis.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Maldives.

Mr. Sareer (Maldives): It is an honour to speak before the Security Council today on an issue that is of profound importance not only to the Maldives but also to efforts to achieve international peace and security.

I would like to thank the Chinese presidency of the Council for convening today's quarterly open debate on the situation in the Middle East. I would also like to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General for his dedicated efforts to find a solution to the discordant situation in the Middle East. With the increase in terror and conflict in the region, peace may seem to some a distant if not impossible prospect, but we should envision its achievement as a journey of a thousand miles that must be taken one step at a time.

Let us look at Palestine, a nation embroiled in conflict for decades. As of now, hope is dim for its people. We reiterate our call for a two-State solution, deemed to be the one and only viable way to achieve enduring peace in the region. The Maldives once again

calls for full realization of the Palestinian people's right to self-determination, their right to establish their own State on the basis of the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

As the death toll from the conflict in Syria now approaches 500,000 lives, we have witnessed immense suffering among the people on both sides of the conflict. The sheer extent of the loss of human life — the lives of men, women and children — must compel us all to work relentlessly to explore every option for a sustainable solution to peace in Syria. We must seek a political solution for ending the bloodshed that is in line with the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people. We would like to underscore the importance of achieving an inclusive political solution in Syria based on the Geneva talks. As such, we urge the United Nations membership to actively contribute to proposing solutions in the hope of finding an avenue to peace.

The situation in Yemen continues to be very worrying, since it also contributes to regional instability. As more ill-fated civilians are caught up in the conflict, we see displaced people fleeing the country for their lives. We must strive to work for peace in Yemen, and in the meantime we must ensure that humanitarian aid reaches all who so desperately need it. The Maldives condemns terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and believes that it should not be associated with any specific religion, race, culture or society. Islam promotes peace and the protection and preservation of life and unity. It also condemns violence. The Maldives does not condone hiding behind religion as a pretext for inflicting terror; it is not a means to a political end.

We see the Middle East as a breeding ground for oppression, hatred and violence, which is the underlying cause of the instability in the region. We need leadership. We need political will. But above all, we need courage — courage from the leaders of the region and leadership from the members of the Council, as well as the international community. We need the tenacity to do what is right and to take the right steps towards creating lasting peace in the Middle East.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Begeç (Turkey): The Middle East is witnessing unprecedented challenges. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with its 70 years of history, is a microcosm of what is happening in the region as a whole today.

Since the last open debate in January (see S/PV.7610), hopes for a viable solution to the Palestinian question have continued to fade and the situation on the ground has deteriorated further. We are very concerned about the latest developments. While our immediate priority should be a rapid de-escalation, at the same time we should all be very cognizant of the fundamental cause of the problem, which is the illegal occupation by Israel of East Jerusalem and other Palestinian territories. Israel's continuing occupation and practices violating international law hinder efforts to achieve a permanent solution. The expansion of illegal settlements poses a major obstacle to peace. Israel's denial of Palestinians' right to use natural resources, its perpetration of extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests and the excessive use of force, its suppression of the right to freedom of association and assembly, its confiscations of land and efforts to undermine the Islamic status and sanctity of Al-Haram Al-Sharif fuel anger among Palestinians, who have been collectively punished for decades. The humanitarian disaster in Gaza, aggravated by the continued imposition of restrictions, further deepens the suffering of the 1.8 million people living in Gaza. Israel should respond to our repeated calls and lift the inhumane blockade.

The current situation is a sombre foreshadowing of what will happen if the prospects for a two-State solution vanish. We all agree that the status quo is unacceptable and unsustainable. In that regard, the thirteenth session of the Islamic Summit Conference, which Turkey hosted in Istanbul on 14 and 15 April, adopted a resolution on Palestine. Furthermore, the Security Council must live up to its primary responsibility for international peace and security, going beyond expressions of condemnation to outline credible and concrete steps for bringing peace and protection to the Palestinians. On the Palestinian side, the need for reconciliation is more relevant than ever. The consistent support and encouragement of the international community is vital in that regard. The establishment of a sovereign and independent Palestinian State within the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, continues to be the only viable solution. Turkey's commitment to supporting the Palestinian people to that end will never cease.

What has happened in Syria is by any definition a humanitarian catastrophe, and as such, a colossal stain on our collective human conscience. No modern conflict has been so devoid of respect for international norms.

Turkey continues to shoulder more than its fair share of the burden of the ongoing devastation. We are extremely concerned about the humanitarian and security impacts of the crisis, which constitute a major national security threat to us. The current chaos that has been created in the northern part of Syria has played into the hands of terrorists, targeting our citizens as well. Just today, rockets fired from Syria hit the Turkish border town of Kilis and killed four people. In addition, we are once again faced with the risk of a new wave of refugees, which has been triggered by the latest regime offensive in Aleppo.

We are at a critical turn in Syria. The third round of negotiations in Geneva has just started. That round should produce a concrete outcome. The regime should be pressured to talk about the essence of the matter, which is political transition. The political process should lead to a transition period with concrete timelines, a new constitution and elections. A transitional governing body with full executive powers should be established. In the meantime, the Council must ensure the implementation of all the measures set out in its own resolutions. Unfortunately, the agreement on the cessation of hostilities has become more fragile owing to the systematic violations on the part of the regime and its allies. Similarly, humanitarian access continues to be hindered by the regime. The removal of medical and surgical items from convoys continues. The United Nations is unlikely to reach its targets for the end of April in terms of the number of civilians needing assistance in besieged and hard-to-reach areas. The lack of progress in those areas could jeopardize the Geneva negotiations.

Another danger facing the process is the efforts to intervene in the opposition delegation. The high negotiations committee, as one of the two negotiating parties, remains engaged in the political process despite efforts to compromise its integrity. Non-intervention by third parties to the composition of the opposition negotiation team is a must for the credibility and sustainability of the process. Attempts to dilute and weaken the opposition will only harm the process. The current tragedy will not end unless the people of Syria have a legitimate Government that truly represents their will and enjoys their full consent.

I would like to conclude my remarks on two positive notes. With regard to Libya, we welcome the arrival and assumption of duties by the Presidential Council in Tripoli on 30 March. Turkey's support for that crucial step was demonstrated by the visit of our special representative to Tripoli on 4 and 5 April, which was the first international visit to the Presidential Council at its headquarters. We recently hosted Mr. Sarraj, President of the Presidential Council, on the occasion of thirteenth Islamic Summit in Istanbul. His participation contributed to the visibility of the Council. We are also ready to host the Ministerial Conference on International Support to Libya, as was decided in Rome in March 2014. Turkey will continue to support Libya.

I would also like to express our support for the start of the cessation of hostilities in Yemen. We hope that the ceasefire will be observed and that the peace talks to be held under the auspices of the United Nations in Kuwait will succeed.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Iceland.

Mr. Gunnarsson (Iceland): Allow me to thank the Chinese presidency of the Security Council for having organized this quarterly debate on the situation in the Middle East, including on Israel and Palestine.

The region of the Middle East is witnessing an unprecedented series of conflicts and crises, inflicting suffering on millions of civilians. The international community, led by the Council, is addressing those crises in all their urgency, from Syria to Libya and to Yemen. Iceland praises the countries in region that are hosting such a large number of refugees and is contributing new funds to assist countries in the region dealing with refugee crisis.

As has been observed, we live in an age when wars have no winners, only losers. Broad support has been expressed for highlighting prevention and political solutions in the conclusions of the report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (see S/2015/446) and the Secretary-General's report (S/2015/682) on their implementation. We urge the Security Council to refocus its preventative and political powers on the oldest conflict in the Middle East. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a primary example in which decisive action by the Security Council and the international community is needed to prevent further degeneration of the situation. The simmering nature of that conflict is in danger of moving to a boil. The spate of violent attacks against Israeli civilians continues, with the death of 30 innocent Israeli civilians in recent months. That is unacceptable, as is the targeting of any other innocent civilians. Of deep concern as well are

the killings by Israeli security forces of a large number of Palestinians in relation to the spate of attacks, raising questions of due process and the excessive use of force. Israeli security forces have killed approximately 180 Palestinians since last September. Al-Haram Al-Sharif has remained quiet in recent months. We would encourage all parties involved to make sure that it continues to do so. Action to prevent further conflict is urgent.

First, it is urgent to defend the only clear course to sustainable peace, the two-State solution. Israel continues with illegal settlements, land appropriation and punitive demolitions, despite international condemnation. Those actions are in breach of international law. They also seriously threaten the viability of the two-State solution. Iceland urges the Security Council to go beyond the words of condemnation expressed by individual Council members and to take action as a body to send a clear signal to the Israeli authorities that settlements are unacceptable. If we are all as serious about the two-State solution as we say we are, the Security Council must defend it.

Secondly, the international community needs to do more to lend impetus to the search for peace. Iceland welcomes the launch by France of an international support group and the call for a peace conference. In the search for peace, we should not forget the huge potential that exists in involving women on all sides.

Thirdly, ways need to be found to re-establish trust among the parties. That is principally the responsibility of leaders on both sides, who need to be open to creative and innovative solutions. But the international community, led by the Security Council, should search for ways to bring a sense of hope and a horizon of security for the Palestinians and for Israel. That should include looking at measures to establish international protection.

Fourthly, the situation in Gaza needs to be normalized as part of a preventative approach. The firing of rockets from Gaza into Israel is totally unacceptable. The authorities on the ground are responsible for preventing such action. Israeli responses should be proportionate. But if Gaza is not to become a breeding ground for radicalization, then reconstruction must be accelerated and the Strip's isolation lifted.

Iceland condemns all acts of violence against civilians. We believe that the security Council must take firm action to safeguard the path to peace and the two-State solution in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We also believe that broader international involvement is now necessary to break the impasse, and we welcome the French initiative.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Viet Nam.

Mrs. Nguyen (Viet Nam): I join previous speakers in thanking the Chinese presidency for convening this important open debate. My thanks also go to the Secretary-General for his briefing this morning.

Viet Nam aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

Constructive dialogue, negotiation and the employment of other peaceful means are the only realistic way to settle international disputes. That is particularly true for the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. Viet Nam advocates the peaceful settlement of the protracted Israeli-Palestinian conflict in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative, aiming at achieving a just, comprehensive and lasting solution and ensuring the legitimate interests of all the parties concerned. Viet Nam supports the two-State solution with a vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side-by-side in peace, security and mutual recognition.

We are therefore extremely alarmed by the most recent report of the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Middle East Peace Process, which highlights that the current negative trends on the ground are imperilling the viability of a two-State solution. We are deeply concerned about the recent complicating developments in the region, in particular the latest round of violence, which has cost hundreds of lives. We feel heavy-hearted at seeing the humanitarian crisis unfolding in the West Bank and Gaza and the plight of millions of Palestinians. Viet Nam calls for an end to all acts of violence. We urge Israel to immediately halt illegal settlement activities, land confiscations and the construction of the separation wall, and to strictly abide by international, humanitarian law and human rights law. We appeal to all the parties concerned to uphold their determination to resolve the conflict through negotiations and to refrain from any acts of violence and hostility that escalate tensions. It is essential that priority be given to the mitigation of the pain and

hardship of the Palestinian people, who have suffered for many decades.

Viet Nam has always supported the struggle of the Palestinian people for their fundamental rights, especially the sacred right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent State. We call for an early resumption of negotiations between the parties concerned and welcome renewed efforts by the United Nations, the Quartet, the League of Arab States and regional countries to help promote the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations on all core issues, with a view to achieving just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Kazakhstan.

Mr. Abdrakhmanov (Kazakhstan): I thank the Chinese presidency for convening this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, which compels us to take urgent action, without which the present tensions could destabilize global security. We also thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

Our world and the Middle East are once again in danger, and the risks cannot be underestimated. It is with that in view that President Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan presented a new security paradigm document entitled "Manifesto: The World. The 21st Century" at the 2016 Nuclear Security Summit, held recently in Washington, D.C. The manifesto is significant as it announces a momentous stand on the issue of war and peace. To implement it, he proposed the establishment of a global coalition of States for peace, stability, trust and security, under the auspices of the United Nations. The common task of the coalition for the next decade should be to end wars and conflicts, including in the Middle East.

The Head of my State underlines that a world without conflicts requires the removal of injustice, which is its root cause. It is obvious that barriers to trade and development have to be lifted, while the principles of international law must be reaffirmed and respected by all countries. Those steps should be completed, President Nazarbayev urges, by the time the United Nations celebrates its centenary. In addition, the President warns that

> "In the twenty-first, century humankind must take decisive steps towards demilitarization. We will not have another chance."

All of those approaches are quite relevant to the situation in the Middle East. It is clear that tensions in the Middle East also gravitate around the Palestinian issue. We realize that the two-State solution, the recognition of the Palestinians' right to self-determination and the creation of an independent State of Palestine, peacefully coexisting with Israel within the pre-1967 borders, are the only means of durable peace. We also stand for promoting Palestine's full-fledged membership in the United Nations and encourage Israeli and Palestinian leaders to demonstrate a political commitment to reach a historic peace agreement.

Kazakhstan fully supports the Syrian peace process within the Geneva III peace talks and resolution 2254 (2015). We call on Member States to endorse the measures of the Secretary-General, the Arab League and the International Syria Support Group to find viable solutions. As our input, Kazakhstan hosted in Astana in 2015 two rounds of Syrian consultations, which were attended by the leaders of different opposition groups and representatives of Syrian ethnic and religious minorities.

By setting an example in Central Asia, the Government of Kazakhstan fully endorses the long-standing proposal of establishing in the Middle East a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. Establishing such a zone is dictated by its pivotal role in ensuring both regional and global security. Once again, we call upon all interested parties to exert political will, understanding and trust to overcome the different standpoints and to speedily establish such a zone.

Furthermore, at the initiative of my country and other partners, under the auspices of the United Nations and the President of the General Assembly, a high-level dialogue, entitled "Religions for Peace", will convene on 6 May to demonstrate the power of religious unity against the destructive nature of terrorism and violent extremism.

At the recent thirteenth Summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, held less than a week ago in Istanbul, the leadership of Kazakhstan, together with the host country, initiated the process of Islamic reconciliation as a new paradigm of relations in the Muslim world, with the aim of reaching a peaceful settlement of disputes and strengthening the unity of the Islamic Ummah. We therefore call on the leadership of

all countries in the region to take the necessary measures to prevent further escalation of sectarian tensions.

In conclusion, we reiterate Kazakhstan's commitment to join the multilateral effort to ensure peace in the Middle East.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Thailand.

Mr. Plasai (Thailand) (*spoke in French*): The Kingdom of Thailand shares the concern of the international community on the issue of the alarming escalation of violence in several cities in Israel and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, which erupted in October last year with no sign of ending. We therefore commend China's initiative to convene this debate, and we thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

As a friend of both Israel and Palestine, we reaffirm our strong support for a two-State solution, with a vision of the Israelis and the Palestinians living side by side in peace, harmony and prosperity. However, the ongoing violence and the absence of genuine political dialogue have dimmed the prospects for such a solution. It is therefore a high priority for all stakeholders and the international community to revitalize the peace process, starting by promoting an atmosphere conductive to a resumption of dialogue. As our contribution to this debate, allow me to highlight the following points.

First, as a prerequisite for future negotiations, we must de-escalate the situation on the ground and end violence. Incitement and hate speech, coupled with unhelpful rhetoric, have led to confrontations and inflamed violence. We urge all the parties concerned to exercise maximum restraint and to refrain from any provocative acts. The sanctity of all holy sites must be respected and safeguarded. All attempts to alter the status quo at those sites, including Jerusalem and Hebron, must cease immediately.

Secondly, the ongoing settlement activities and home demolitions in the occupied territories are most worrisome and have caused the massive displacement of people. That practice has heightened tensions and undermined the possibility of a resumption of the peace process. Therefore, we urge strict implementation of the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions in that regard.

Thirdly, we are particularly concerned about the dire humanitarian situation and the deterioration of the living conditions of more than 1 million people affected by the long-standing conflict, including the Palestinian refugees and prisoners. We stress the need for all parties to respect international humanitarian law and to ensure unimpeded access for all to humanitarian assistance. We stress as well that there is an urgent need to rebuild public facilities and the basic infrastructure necessary for better livelihoods and economic development. In particular, we join the international call for the lifting of the Gaza Strip blockade to allow the resumption of normal economic activities there.

We take this opportunity to reaffirm our continued support for the tireless efforts of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East to ease the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, the West Bank and Jerusalem. We also commend the countries of the region and beyond for their generosity and contributions to assist millions of Palestinians affected by the conflict, and we will continue to work closely with the international community to help alleviate the humanitarian crisis in the region.

The conflict has been at the top of the Council's agenda for decades. More than 200 resolutions have been adopted, but the situation on the ground remains alarming. The Council must live up to its responsibilities and address this issue in a more efficient manner so as to bring about peace and security and ensure the safety and well-being of the peoples of the region.

To conclude, we reiterate our firm conviction that a two-State solution is the best path to peace. We must intensify our efforts to break through the political impasse and reinvigorate the peace process. Thailand urges all parties to make a genuine commitment to rebuilding trust and confidence and to working together towards a just and lasting solution through peaceful means.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Qatar.

Ms. Al-Thani (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): We wish warmly to thank you, Mr. President, for having convened this meeting, and we should like also to thank the Secretary-General for the comments he made this morning. We endorse the statements made on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

The various challenges facing the world require that the parties to conflict respect international law and international humanitarian law and work to ease

tensions, which have had disastrous consequences for international peace and security. The aim of the Security Council is a comprehensive and just peace throughout the world, including the Middle East. To that end, we must halt Israel's violations and illegal practices by putting an end to the occupation and the settlement policy as well as to the crimes perpetrated by Israeli settlers, bringing the perpetrators to justice. All illegal actions must stop, including those targeting holy sites, the killing of and detention of Palestinians, the confiscation of their land and the destruction of their homes.

Resolving the Palestinian question can come about only on the basis of internationally accepted norms, namely, the two-State solution and the creation of an independent and viable Palestinian State on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side in peace and security with an Israeli State, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), the Arab Peace Initiative, the return of refugees, respect for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and the end of the Israeli occupation of all occupied Palestinian lands.

Any attempt to impose a policy of fait accompli on the occupied Syrian Golan Heights represents not only a breach of international law and resolution 497 (1981) and the relevant General Assembly resolutions, but is also null and void, can have no legal consequence and undermines efforts to bring about peace in the Middle East.

Everyone recognizes the fact that peace can be achieved only if the Palestinians regain their inalienable rights to life, safety, self-determination and dignified living conditions in their own independent State. It is up to the Council to take the steps necessary to implement those resolutions and bring about peace by taking all measures necessary to provide international protection to the Palestinian people and to launch credible negotiations on all aspects of a final solution, in order to bring to an end the Israeli occupation of all occupied Arab territories, put a total and immediate stop to all settlement activity, lift the Gaza blockade, and rebuild all that was destroyed by the Israeli war machine.

Qatar is fully convinced of the importance of the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip and of the positive impact thereof. We have therefore promised to provide $1 billion in aid towards the reconstruction of Gaza. In fulfilment of that promise, we have already built 1,060 housing units in Sheikh Hamid bin Khalifa Al-Thani city, in Gaza, and work on 1,200 other units is under way. We have also built a hospital and carried out 45 domestic road projects.

Regarding Syria, despite the efforts deployed by the international community, represented by the International Syria Support Group, and Council resolution 2268 (2016), the Syrian regime continues to carry out violations and attacks against civilians and civilian targets. It continues to carry out massacres, including that of Deir al-Asafir, in which dozens of people were killed, including children. Civilian facilities were clearly targeted there. It also continues to hamper humanitarian convoys and to block access to the various areas under its control, which causes great difficulties for United Nations personnel.

The only way to put a lasting end to the violence is through the full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015), which reaffirms that the only lasting solution to this crisis will come through an inclusive, Syrian-led political process, so as to achieve the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people fully to implement the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and enable the creation of a transitional entity, the freeing of prisoners, the lifting of the blockade and access for humanitarian convoys.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Bahrain.

Mr. Alrowaiei (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I should like to thank you, Mr. President, for having convened this meeting and to thank your friendly delegation for your presidency of the Council during this month. I should like also to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing at the beginning of this important debate.

The Kingdom of Bahrain reaffirms its firm stance in support of the Palestinian question and of the efforts made to achieve the aspirations of the Palestinian people, so as to bring about a comprehensive and lasting peace through the establishment of an independent Palestinian State on the June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The question of Palestine has become more complicated because of the intensification of the settlement process, the siege and the repeated acts of aggression against the Palestinian people and their holy

sites. These illegal actions undermine the prospects for peace and give rise to a climate conducive to the escalation of extremism, hatred and violence, which goes against the values of all religions and those of peaceful societies that promote coexistence.

His Majesty the King of Bahrain, King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, in his address to the thirteenth summit of the Islamic Conference, convened in Turkey, noted that the peace process in the Middle East has become much more complicated and has even reached a standstill because of the persistence of Israeli practices that oppose peace, the expansion of settlement activity, the confiscation of land, the continued siege of the Gaza Strip and the repeated acts of aggression carried out against the Palestinian people and Islamic shrines, especially the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

The King of Bahrain rejects and condemns such Israeli practices and calls upon the international community to put an end to them, as they have undermined the peace process and promoted hatred and terrorism in the region. His Majesty stressed the importance of reviving the peace process on the basis of international law and the Arab Peace Initiative.

The challenges are daunting, but our stance remains firm, especially concerning the right of the Palestinian people to build their independent State on their national territory, with East Jerusalem as its capital. Sincere efforts to find a just, comprehensive and lasting solution of the situation in the Middle East should be based on ending the illegal Israeli occupation of Arab territories by Israel, including the Syrian Golan, lifting the illegal blockade against Gaza and the complete withdrawal of Israel from the remaining Lebanese territory, according to relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, resolutions of the Arab Peace Initiative and decisions by the Quartet, as well as on finding a solution that would ensure the return of Palestinian refugees to their homeland, in line with General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

In conclusion, we call upon the international community to take all the measures necessary to provide international protection for the Palestinian people and to end the Israeli occupation of all Arab territories so as to achieve lasting and comprehensive peace. We also stress the need to intensify efforts in support of our Palestinian brothers and their aspirations to achieve their inalienable rights.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Bangladesh.

Mr. Momen (Bangladesh): We convey our appreciation to the Chinese presidency for convening this open debate. It is somewhat reassuring that the Palestinian question is being discussed in the Security Council at certain intervals against the backdrop of its continued inability to act on this seminal concern for the maintenance of international peace and security

My delegation aligns itself with the statements made today by the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and by representative of Kuwait on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

The overriding message is that the world expects the Council to act in a determined, visible and sustained manner to find a just and lasting solution to the Palestinian question. The continued occupation of Palestinian territories, the systematic human rights violations, the indiscriminate attacks against civilians and the expansion of illegal settlements by Israel, the occupying Power, constitute an affront to the values and principles that the Organization stands for. The Council must demonstrate its resolve to address the Palestinian question as a matter of urgency. Immediate priority must be given to ensuring international protection for the Palestinian people, who have been suffering for decades.

The continued breaches of international humanitarian law in the occupied Palestinian territories have given rise to an egregious culture of impunity. In the absence of any international accountability or sanctions, the occupying Power continues to kill Palestinian citizens, especially youth and children, imprisoning and abusing scores of Palestinians in its detention centres and injuring and displacing thousands of Palestinian families through its construction and expansion of illegal settlements. It is obvious that the policy of settlements and the construction of the wall in and around occupied East Jerusalem are being deliberately pursued in order to fundamentally change the character, status and demography of the occupied Palestinian territories. That will only serve to indefinitely postpone the Middle East peace process, and thus to destabilize the prospects for a two-State solution based on the pre-1967 borders.

The Council has a moral obligation to prevail upon Israel to immediately halt its illegal settlement

regime in the occupied Palestinian territories, lift the blockade in the Gaza Strip and put an end to all forms of occupation. Immediate priority must be given to ensuring international protection for the Palestinian people, who have been suffering for decades from Israel's policy of collective punishment.

We have stated a number of times here — and we will continue to do so — that the continued injustice around the Palestinian question remains at the root of a number of scourges that bedevil international peace and security. Among a host of potential scenarios, the resolution of the Palestinian question will help dry up the ideological reservoir that many international terrorist and violent extremist groups tend to draw on. The moral and ethical issues involved in the Palestinian question need to be unequivocally upheld in order to defeat the twisted and corrosive messaging used by violent extremists to serve their own vested agenda.

In line with our constitutional commitment, the Government and the people of Bangladesh maintain unwavering support for the just and legitimate struggle of the Palestinian people for their inalienable rights, including their right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent, viable, contiguous and sovereign Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side with Israel. Our Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has consistently articulated this message in her annual addresses to the General Assembly.

We continue to urge all key actors to remain seized of efforts to pursue a comprehensive solution to the Palestinian question, consistent with the relevant Security Council resolutions and in accordance with the Arab Peace Initiative, the Quartet road map and the principle of land-for-peace. In that context, we take this opportunity to reiterate our support for a Council resolution to revive the political efforts aimed at achieving the desired two-State solution and the convening of an international conference to address the multidimensional aspects of the Palestinian question in a focused, structured and holistic manner.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Atlassi (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, and to commend your initiative in organizing this open debate to discuss the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, during China's presidency of the Security Council this month. This is a clear sign of your country's commitment to accord the subject the importance it deserves under the current circumstances.

My country notes with deep concern the unprecedented deterioration of the situation in Palestine at a time when the international community has shifted its attention to other developments. Despite the importance of those new developments, the question of Palestine should be the focus of attention by the international community, not only because it is a central issue for the Palestinians, Arabs and Muslims all over the world, but because it is one that concerns all peace-loving people and advocates for peace across the globe.

The settlement of the situation in the Middle East hinges on the solution of the Palestinian question, which is the central question and the key to the resolution of all issues in the region. Any delay in finding a just and lasting solution for the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, based on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, would complicate the issue at the expense of Palestinian patience. For the Palestinian people are pinning their hopes on peace and and looking forward to the fulfilment of their aspirations.

The Kingdom of Morocco, whose Head of State, His Majesty King Mohammed VI, chairs the Al-Quds Committee, feels the pain of the Palestinians in general and is pained at the situation in Jerusalem given the continued deterioration of the state of affairs in Palestine as a result of the Judaization, the continued policy of building settlements, the forcible transfer of people and repeated attacks against the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem and the worshippers. The impasse that international efforts reached in this area has complicated all potential solutions.

The international community now has the duty to use all its efforts and innovative methods in order to bring back the Palestinians and Israelis to the negotiating table, not for the sake of negotiations but to achieve the two-State solution, based on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the capital of a Palestinian State. Such negotiations should be based on good faith, according to pre-established timelines in order to restore confidence between the parties, according to the relevant United Nations resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative. His Majesty King Mohammed VI, in his capacity as Chair of the Jerusalem Committee, in his address to the fifth

Extraordinary Summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, held in Jakarta last month, supports all serious initiatives aimed at ending the Israeli occupation and to achieve the independence of the State of Palestine, based on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Morocco also supports the initiative of France to find a solution to the Palestinian question, including through the convening of an international conference. During the thirteenth session of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, which was hosted by Turkey last week, the King of Morocco said,

> "We can only stress our support for the invitation of our brother, President Mahmoud Abbas of the State of Palestine, to convene an international peace conference aimed at ending the Israeli occupation, as that is a basic step towards ending the catastrophic and volatile situation in Palestine and restoring the hope that a peaceful, just and lasting peace on the basis of the two-State solution can be reached. We also support the French initiative, which aims at bringing the Israeli and Palestinian parties to the negotiating table and at ending the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory, according to a clear timeline."

The King also called for the adoption of an approach that would merge political actions and diplomatic efforts, while highlighting legitimate rights and work in the field. The Holy Jerusalem Endowment Trust Fund would implement specific projects aimed at supporting the inhabitants of Jerusalem and saving the city that is at the core of the conflict. In that regard, because Morocco remains committed to supporting work on the ground that benefits Palestinians, we have assumed responsibility for more than 85 per cent of the Trust Fund's budget in order to continue the implementation of projects on Palestinian territory.

The only sound and viable path towards the resolution of the Palestinian question is not one of war, bloodshed and the killing of innocent civilians. Rather, the parties should return to the negotiating table in good faith within clear-cut parameters in order to achieve the solution of two States coexisting in peace, harmony, security and cooperation. Morocco continues to base its position with regard to the Palestinian conflict on the Arab Peace Initiative and the principles of the Madrid terms of reference, which seek to achieve peace through the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, based on the borders of June 1967.

In conclusion, we would like to stress that the international community is called upon more than ever before to revive the peace process with a specific timeline and on the basis of the norms and principles set forth in United Nations resolutions. Morocco stands ready to fully participate in all efforts and initiatives aimed at advancing the peace process with a view to reaching a settlement that consolidates peace and stability in the region.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Tunisia.

Mr. Khiari (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank you, Sir, for convening this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. I would also like to extend thanks to the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, for the briefing he presented at the beginning of this meeting on his recent visit to a number of countries, including Tunisia, and the most recent developments in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Once again we meet, as we have done for decades, while the Israeli settlers and the forces of the occupation continue their daily acts of aggression and violations against the unarmed Palestinian people and their Christian and Islamic holy sites in Jerusalem, in particular Al-Aqsa Mosque, in blatant violation of international legitimacy, charters and laws.

The occupation authorities continue their settlement campaign despite the growing rejection of it by the international community. We are all in agreement that such a campaign constitutes a violation of international law. There is no longer any doubt that Israel continues to impose a policy of fait accompli in order to gain more time to change the status quo by force and impede any attempts or initiatives aimed at achieving peace based on the two-State solution. That solution has been undermined by the settler colonialist expansion. It is therefore time for the international community, in particular the Council, to assume full responsibility for bringing an end to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territory and the Israeli practices against the Palestinian people.

We are all in agreement that both the occupation and the practices are illegal and illegitimate. It is time to effect a genuine change with regard to how the

Council deals with the question of Palestine. Today, there is no option for diffusing the tension and ending the continued turbulence other than to put an end to the unprecedented settler colonialism and occupation, which is the crux of the problem. There must be a serious and responsible movement, before it is too late, with the goal of arriving at a peaceful, just and comprehensive solution that guarantees the Palestinian people their right to establish a sovereign viable, independent and contiguous State on their territory — which has been occupied since 1967 — with East Jerusalem as its capital.

My delegation supports any genuine effort that would contribute to achieving that goal, and therefore welcomes the initiative mentioned this morning by the representative of France. Tunisia also supports the Palestinian request that the United Nations provide international protection for Palestinian civilians within the occupied Palestinian territories in accordance with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, international law and international humanitarian law. We also reiterate our goal to have the embargo imposed on the Gaza Strip lifted and to secure the delivery of humanitarian assistance to civilians. The success of the process to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East depends on the full withdrawal of Israel from all occupied Palestinian and Arab territories, including the occupied Syrian Arab Golan, as well as the territories still occupied in south Lebanon.

Before concluding, I must express Tunisia's satisfaction at the resumption of negotiations under the auspices of the United Nations in Geneva for the political settlement of the Syrian crisis and at the cessation of hostilities, which was achieved thanks to the laudable efforts of the United States and the Russian Federation. Tunisia hopes that our Syrian brothers will seize this important and historic opportunity and take advantage of the support of the international community, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, and the International Syria Support Group, in order to achieve a political settlement that puts an end to the crisis and violence, preserves the territorial integrity of Syria and promotes societal cohesion in accordance with the aspirations of the Syrian people.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Nigeria.

Mr. Sarki (Nigeria): At the outset, Nigeria aligns itself with the statements delivered by the representative of the State of Kuwait on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

We wish to thank the Permanent Representative of Namibia for delivering a statement on behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. We also wish to thank the delegation of China for convening today's debate, which provides an opportunity for reflection on the seemingly intractable situation in the Middle East. Furthermore, we thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his briefing and commend him for the moral voice that he has lent to the search for peace in the Middle East. We welcome his recent visit to the region, during which he met with high-level officials in furtherance of his good-offices efforts.

The surge in the violence and senseless killings in the occupied Palestinian territory, perpetrated by extremists and so well described by previous speakers, is deeply worrying. Fears have been expressed that, if the situation is not contained, there is a possibility of further escalation, with its attendant predictable consequences. The international community must therefore work in a concerted manner to avert another catastrophe in the region.

We condemn the indiscriminate killings in the strongest possible terms. They are unjustifiable. We must avert a scenario where extremists dictate the political agenda, as that could provide fuel to the conflict and complicate the difficult search for peace even further. Provocations and hostile rhetoric must be avoided. The status of all the holy sites must be respected and protected against hostile actions.

Nigeria takes note of the latest report issued by the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. We share the concern of the Special Coordinator that the viability of a two-State solution is in danger owing to the negative trends on the ground, including the recent escalation in violence, ongoing settlement activities, demolitions, incitement and the absence of Palestinian unity.

It is evident that a departure from the current crisis and a revival of the peace process are hardly achievable without ending the policy of settlement expansion in the occupied Palestinian territories. We believe that there are a number of specific actions that are necessary in order to foster mutual respect and compromise, build

confidence and pave the way for the realization of the two-State solution. The international community, in particular the Security Council, has the responsibility to constructively address that issue before it is too late.

In that regard, we urge Israel to take concrete steps to freeze all its settlement-related activities in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The current stalemate in the Middle East peace process is neither ideal nor sustainable. Both sides must take concrete steps to return to negotiations on the basis of the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Quartet road map, the Madrid terms of reference, the Arab Peace Initiative and the relevant agreements between the parties. Nigeria supports the efforts of the international community aimed at establishing an environment conducive to a return to meaningful negotiations on ending the occupation and resolving the long-running conflict.

The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (General Assembly resolution 70/1) serves to underscore that no one should be left behind in the legitimate expectation of the enjoyment of the right to development for all people. However, it is clear that the Palestinian people will not benefit from that set of goals without a viable land to call their home and country and without a lasting peace to enjoy the fruits of their labour and industry. The Security Council must, as a matter of duty and necessity, ensure that the Palestinian people are not left behind and alienated from the stream of global peace, prosperity and the full enjoyment of liberty, freedom and human rights.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): The representative of Israel has requested the floor to make a further statement. I now give her the floor.

Ms. Meitzad (Israel): As we sit here today debating, my country is being attacked. In fact, while the Security Council has been deliberating on the situation in the Middle East, we received word of yet another terror attack in Jerusalem. A bus was blown up in downtown Jerusalem, injuring dozens of people, some of them critically. Shockingly enough, the only Council members to even mention the attack in their remarks were Ukraine, Uruguay and the United States. We expect the Council to condemn the attack.

Also, just this morning, the Israel Defence Forces revealed that it had discovered a tunnel from Gaza that reaches into Israeli territory. That terror tunnel, which is hundreds of feet below ground, is equipped with electrical systems and lined with concrete. We have warned time and again that Hamas has been diverting the cement that has been sent in for the reconstruction of homes and schools to rearm and prepare for the next round of conflict. Today we have another piece of concrete proof. This fact was also almost completely ignored.

The tunnel has one purpose and one purpose only: to carry out terror attacks against innocent Israelis. A bus bombing in Jerusalem and terror tunnels out of Gaza have come to light, but in this Chamber it is business as usual. Once again, many in this Chamber focus solely on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict but ignore terror against Israel. Some delegations even chose to undermine the credibility of this important platform by presenting false accusations, distorted information and one-sided statements. To those States, and especially those who sit in the Council, like Malaysia and Venezuela, or to Saudi Arabia and others who wish to position themselves as relevant players, I would like to say the following.

You can either continue to falsely blame Israel for all that is wrong in the Middle East in order to serve your narrow, domestic political needs, or you can end the zero-sum-game approach and take a constructive approach instead. It is no surprise when countries like Venezuela and Malaysia, with long histories of suppressing freedom of speech and freedom of expression at home, distort the reality here at the United Nations. They do not let the facts get into the way of the one-sided story.

I would also like to say that I find it odd that Saudi Arabia, a country that has been accused of indiscriminate bombing and war crimes in Yemen, has the audacity to make reckless allegations against others.

Iran and Lebanon once again chose to falsely criticize Israel. Need I remind you, Mr. President, that Iran is the number-one sponsor of terror in the region, whether it be with the Houthis in Yemen or Hizbullah, which is starving people in Madaya, or its recent outrageous plan offering to make payments to Palestinian terrorists? Wherever there is terror or instability in the region, Iran is at the helm. That is the very same Iran that was recently condemned by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) for its support of terror.

Turning to Lebanon, a country that has a terror organization, Hizbullah, as an integral part of its Government, the Lebanese Government recently

become the sole champion and protector of Hizbullah, while outside Lebanon that terror group is being condemned for its destabilizing role in the region by the United Nations, the Arab League and the OIC. And yet Lebanon has no shame in criticizing Israel.

To my Palestinian colleagues, I would like to say that there is no other way forward than by direct negotiations. A mere two weeks ago, Prime Minister Netanyahu repeated his call for direct negotiations. He said,

> "I am inviting President Abbas again. I have cleared my schedule this week. Any day he can come, I will be here. My door is always open to those who want to pursue peace with Israel."

We call upon the Palestinians to accept our call for negotiations and fully condemn the incitement and terror against Israelis. We call on them to publicly renounce terror and join us on the path to peace and reconciliation.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): The representative of Malaysia has requested the floor to make a further statement. I now give him the floor.

Mr. Abdul Razak (Malaysia): I take the floor, unfortunately, to respond to the statement made by my colleague from Israel.

First, my delegation categorically rejects the allegations made. They serve no other purpose than to divert the Security Council's attention from the real matter at hand, which is the continuing situation in Palestine, which is under occupation by Israel.

Malaysia's position on Palestine is based on the values and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, international law, including international human rights law and humanitarian law, as well as the various resolutions of the United Nations, including those of the Security Council. Yet Israel continues to completely and flagrantly disregard international law and disrespects international human rights standards. Israel is in violation of countless resolutions and decisions of the Council, the General Assembly, the Human Rights Council and even the International Court of Justice. Its lack of cooperation with United Nations human-rights mechanisms, is described in detail in the latest report (A/HRC/31/73) of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories.

With regard to terrorism, Malaysia's long-standing position is to condemn all acts of terror and the killing of civilians, regardless of whether the victims are Israelis or Palestinians. It is, however, unfortunate that terrorism has become a convenient narrative that Israel uses to portray itself as a victim, cover up its illegal actions and mask its intention to destroy the possibility of a two-State solution. We urge the Israeli delegation to focus its energies on addressing the various concerns raised by my delegation and other Member States today, rather than attempting to divert our attention.

The meeting rose at 6.45 p.m.